THE MINUTE BOYS OF THE WYOMING VALLEY

JAMES OTIS

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THE MINUTE BOYS OF THE WYOMING VALLEY

AMERICAN HISTORY STORIES FOR BOYS

THE MINUTE BOY SERIES

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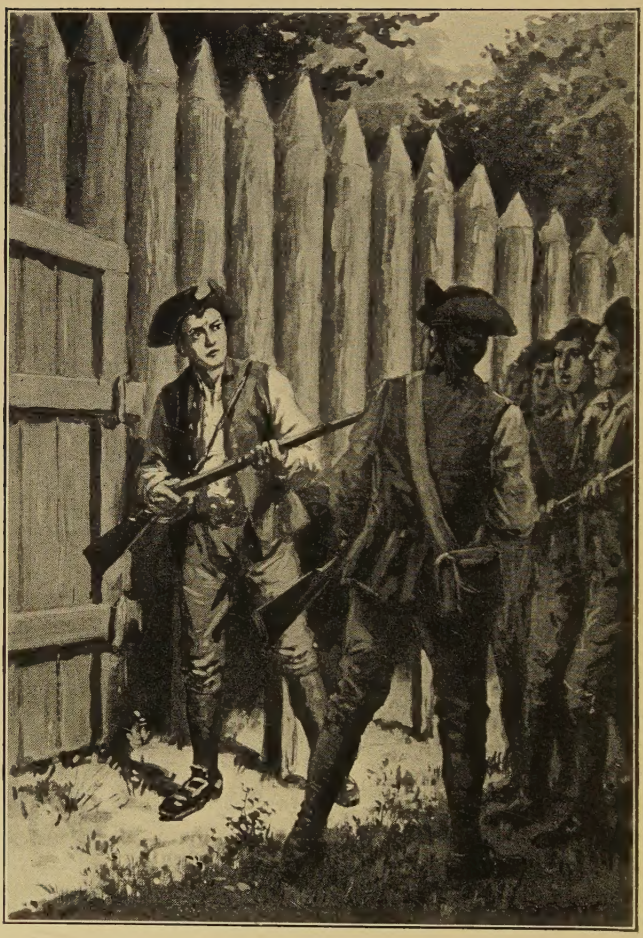

"'SO TRUE AS I LIVE, I WILL SHOOT.'"

THE MINUTE BOYS OF THE WYOMING VALLEY

BY

JAMES OTIS

AUTHOR OF

"MINUTE BOYS OF THE GREEN MOUNTAINS," "MINUTE BOYS OF THE MOHAWK VALLEY," ETC., ETC.

Illustrated by

A. BURNHAM SHUTE

BOSTON

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THE MINUTE BOYS OF THE
WYOMING VALLEY

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FOREWORD

It was the good fortune of the writer, a short time ago, to find in manuscript form a story — perhaps a diary would be more nearly correct — of that which the boys of Wyoming Valley did during the year 1778, while their fathers were fighting the battles of the Revolution elsewhere.

It is not necessary to explain how that manuscript came into my possession, nor to speak of the doubts which I had concerning the accuracy of the information given, because in the last case every statement made by the lad Jonathan Ogden has been verified by the works of such historians as Fiske, Lossing, and Bancroft.

It is essential, however, to a thorough understanding of the conditions existing in that portion of what is now the State of Pennsylvania, known as Wyoming Valley, to state as briefly as may be the troubles and trials which fell to the lot of the settlers there prior to the opening of the War of the Revolution.

Every fellow finds fault, and with good cause,

at being forced to stop in the midst of a narrative to read historical matters which are of no very great interest, even though they may serve to enlighten him as to the reason of the movements of the several characters; therefore, as the editor, rather than the author, I propose to give a synopsis of the story of the settlement of Wyoming Valley, as set down by Lossing in his "Field Book of the Revolution."

In 1753 an association was formed in Connecticut, called the Susquehanna Company, the object of which was to plant a colony in Wyoming Valley. At that time Connecticut claimed, by virtue of its old charter, the northeastern portion of the State of Pennsylvania. In order to strengthen its title to the land, the association purchased from the Six Nations the entire valley of Wyoming and the country westward to the Allegheny River.

Shortly afterward another Connecticut association, called the Delaware Company, purchased from the Indians land upon the Delaware River at a place called Cushetunk, and began a settlement there in 1757, but, owing to the French and Indian War, little was done until 1762, when two hundred colonists began building and planting near the mouth of Mill Creek, a little above the present site of Wilkesbarre.

The reader must remember that at this time the people of Pennsylvania looked upon both these companies as intruders, and proceeded to serve writs

of ejectment upon them, but without any very satisfactory results.

Then came the massacre of 1763, when the Connecticut settlers were killed or driven away by the Delawares.

Now, Governor Penn, claiming that this valley of Wyoming belonged to him by virtue of his original grant, and desirous of avoiding legal complications, bargained with the Six Nations for this same land which they had sold to the Connecticut associations, and received from them a deed to the same.

Thus it was that in 1769 the State of Pennsylvania claimed the Wyoming Valley by virtue of its original grant and the purchase just effected; the State of Connecticut claimed the same territory through its ancient grant; the Susquehanna Company laid claims to it because of the permission granted by the State of Connecticut and the purchase from the Six Nations, while the Delaware Company believed it had equal rights with the others.

Therefore were there four claimants, each of whom was trying to establish a colony, and at the same time drive away those whom it was claimed were intruders.

It can be understood what confusion necessarily arose under such conditions, and it is needless to attempt to give here all the disputes and quarrels which ensued.

Each claimant built a fort or blockhouse where was the headquarters of his particular faction, and

from which they sallied out in absolute warfare against the other dwellers in the valley. In 1770 members of the Susquehanna Company, called by the people of Pennsylvania "the Yankees," fought a pitched battle with the "Pennymites," in which several men were killed, and no less than six times, between that date and the opening of the War of the Revolution, was the valley the scene of hotly contested, bloody engagements.

All the claimants appealed to the Congress at Philadelphia for such an act as would finally settle the disputes, but the Revolution was begun, and little attention paid to those colonists who were squabbling for the ownership of a small territory when there was so much land on every hand to be had almost for the asking.

When the war broke out, the Assembly of Connecticut forbade further immigration into Wyoming Valley, but yet settlers went there, as if believing only in that one spot could a refuge be found from the wrath of the king and the bloodthirsty savages. In addition to that, people came from the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys, who had no sympathy with either of the parties in what was then known as the Pennymite war, and nearly all of them were avowed Tories.

"In the meanwhile two companies of regular troops, of eighty-two men each, had been raised in the valley, under the resolution of Congress, commanded by Captains Ransom and Durkee, and

were attached to the Connecticut line. The Wintermoots, who had purchased land toward the head of the valley and upon the old banks of the Susquehanna, at a place where bubbled forth a large and living spring of pure water, erected a strong fortification known as Wintermoot's fort."

Because these Wintermoots were avowed Tories, those of the settlers who had espoused the American Cause, met in town meeting and resolved that it had "become necessary for the inhabitants of the town to erect suitable forts as a defence against the common enemy."

The original settlers, as the people of Pennsylvania called themselves, were, to a man, in favor of the Revolution, and this declaration as to fortifications was the first step taken in Wyoming to further and strengthen the cause of liberty.

Lossing says: "A fort was accordingly built, about two miles above Wintermoot's, under the supervision of the families of Jenkins and Harding, called Fort Jenkins. Forty Fort (so called from the first forty Yankees, pioneers of the Susquehanna settlers in Wyoming), then little more than a weak blockhouse, was strengthened and enlarged, and sites for other forts were fixed on at Pittstown, Wilkesbarre, and Hanover. It was agreed in town meeting that these several fortifications should be built by the people 'without either fee or reward from the town.'"

Such, in brief, was the condition of affairs in

Wyoming Valley in 1776. And now, with one more extract from the records of the past, these dry, but necessary, matters of history shall come to an end, save when Jonathan Ogden refers to them in the story which he himself wrote.

On the tenth of March, 1777, the following resolutions were adopted at a town meeting held at Wilkesbarre:

"*Voted,* That the first man that shall make fifty weight of good saltpetre in this town shall be entitled to a bounty of ten pounds lawful money, to be paid out of the town treasury.

"*Voted,* That the selectmen be directed to dispose of the grain in the hands of the treasurer or collector in such a way as to obtain powder and lead to the value of forty pounds lawful money, if they can do the same."

JAMES OTIS.

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THE MINUTE BOYS OF THE WYOMING VALLEY

CHAPTER I.

THE COMPANY

I AM not claiming even to myself that I, Jonathan Ogden, who was just turned sixteen years of age on the first day of June, in the year of grace 1778, was any more ardent in the desire to do whatsoever I might toward breaking the shackles which the king had forged upon us than any other of my acquaintance in or around Wilkesbarre, but it so chanced that when we learned of the doings of the Indians nearabout Conewawah, which was seemingly good proof the red villains had their faces turned toward the valley, the idea of us lads banding ourselves together came into my mind before my comrades had hit upon it.

As a matter of course, even while we were having a war of our own and among ourselves, we had heard of the Minute Boys of the Green Mountains and of Lexington, and more than once had I burned

with the desire to start some such organization in the valley; but what with writs of ejectment here, and attacks by the Tories there, it seemed as if we lads had our hands full in obeying the commands of our elders, without scheming to push ahead for ourselves.

When we learned that Brant and his warriors, with the Johnsons, the Butlers, and their Tory following, were looking with unfriendly eyes toward our little settlements, it seemed of a verity that then was come the time when we few lads might do the work of men, and truly was it needed.

We of the valley had sent forth as soldiers an hundred and sixty-four men, who had already done brave work in New Jersey. When that force marched away, I question if an able-bodied man, of sufficient age to be liable for military duty, had been left at home. We had old men, cripples, and invalids, numbering perhaps seventy-five, and they, with the women, made up the entire list which could be counted on for the defence of our homes.

We in Wilkesbarre knew to our sorrow that, when it was apparent to all the world what the Johnsons and the Butlers would do, our fathers and neighbors in the army pleaded for furloughs in order that they might defend their homes; but such permission had either been refused, or no answer given to the request.

When General Schuyler wrote to the Congress, explaining how helpless were the people of the val-

ley, and asking that some steps be taken toward our defence, a resolution was passed, generously allowing that we raise troops among ourselves, and find "our own arms, accoutrements, and blankets."

On learning this, we all questioned whether our representatives in Congress really understood the condition of affairs when such a resolution was passed, for, if they did, then was it cruel sarcasm to give us permission to raise troops when there were none in the valley left of military age.

All this, as I thus set it down, seems a round-about way of coming at my story. What I should write, and without so many words, is that on a certain morning in June, meeting Elias Shendle as I was driving the cow to pasture, I said to him that which came into my mind on the moment:

"What say you, Elias, to raising a company of lads here in the valley, who shall show that they can do the work of men?"

Elias stared at me with open mouth while one might have counted ten, and then replied doubtfully:

"I question, Jonathan, whether you could find six lads of our age, if you spent a full week in the search."

While Elias was hesitating, the purpose so suddenly come into my mind was strengthened, and, determined to prove that the suggestion I had made could readily be carried out, I forgot about the cow, leaving her to wander as she would, while I said:

"Sit you down, Elias, and let us name over the lads hereabout from thirteen to sixteen years old. If peradventure we can find twenty, would it not be better those twenty were banded together with a single purpose — the defence of our homes, if nothing more — than that we remain idly sucking our thumbs, while Johnson and his Tories, or Brant and his wolves, descend upon us?"

Elias was a lad slow to think, but quick of action once he had grasped an idea, and for the moment he seemingly found it impossible to remember a single name, but, before thirty minutes were gone by, we had a list of twenty-two lads whom I knew could, if they were so disposed, act the part of soldiers, and all of whom were true to the Cause.

That was the beginning of the movement hatched by Elias and me, which resulted in the forming of a company of lads who styled themselves the Minute Boys of the Wyoming Valley.

Some of our elders gave us encouragement by word of mouth. More than that, the most generous could not do, for we had already exhausted our resources in providing for those who had joined the American army; but a goodly number of the people laughed outright when we proposed to take upon ourselves, so far as might be, the defence of the settlements.

A motley party it was when we were first assembled, but I question whether in many of the colonies could have been found an equal number of

lads who were more earnest in their purpose, and more ready to brave hardships and fatigue than we.

Since it is not probable that this poor apology for a history of our doings will be read by any who knew us, there is no good reason why I set down all the names here, save as it shall be necessary to speak of what this or that one did during the years which followed, for until the colonies were free, we Minute Boys of the Wyoming Valley remained together, an independent company even after we joined the Continental Army.

As I was the one who had proposed that we band ourselves together, my comrades made me their captain, and Elias Shendle was the lieutenant. Other officers were not needed.

As a matter of course, we all owned muskets of some kind, for lads of our age were forced to seek food in the forest, and, without meaning to boast of our skill, I dare venture to say that two out of every three could kill a squirrel by "winding him," which is to say that we could bring him down without inflicting a wound. We were accustomed to hardships of every kind; it was not considered a serious matter, save when there might be danger from Indians, for us to go so far afield as to find it necessary to camp in the woods overnight, whatever the season, and, therefore, were we in good bodily condition to take up such duties as we voluntarily, and in the face of the laughter of our neighbors and friends, proposed to assume.

And now that I may arrive the more quickly to the setting down of our deeds, rather than our intentions, let him who reads imagine that we twenty-two lads bound ourselves to come together in the half-ruined hut which had been built by Isaac Bassett, and abandoned when he journeyed with the other Tories to join Johnson, every morning at seven o'clock, in order to drill and otherwise put ourselves in as near soldierly shape as might be come at by me, who had no knowledge whatsoever of military matters.

In three days we had arrived at that point where all of us understood the necessity of obeying without question a word of command, but more than that had not been accomplished, and then was come the time when all those people who had ridiculed the idea of our attempting anything of the kind began to realize that we might be of valuable assistance.

A family by the name of Dykeman, living five miles or more from Wilkesbarre, were murdered or carried away into captivity by the Indians, and then it was that we were needed, for at once every man and woman remaining in the settlement set about making preparations for defence, by building stockades here or there where it seemed probable they might be needed. On the instant we were called upon to man this fort of logs, or that fortified house, that the others might work in safety, and thus, with-

out drill or study, as it were, did we become, in our own eyes at least, veritable soldiers.

Our third station was at Fort Jenkins, about two miles above Wintermoot's Fort, and there we had been asked to go because of word brought in that a party of twelve or fifteen, white men and Indians, had lately been seen entering this resort of the Tories.

We were to the northward of all the other fortifications belonging to our friends, — meaning those who were loyal to the American Cause, — and while opposite our station, directly across the river, were the three Pittstown stockades, we could have no communication with them save by crossing the rapid-running stream, which would require, owing to the current, some considerable time.

In other words, we lads, at whom the people of Wilkesbarre laughed, because we had proposed to set ourselves up as soldiers, were really holding, or pretending to hold, the entrance to the valley, and to do which we had not above twenty rounds of ammunition apiece.

As I have said, it was rumored that white men and Indians had been seen entering Wintermoot's Fort stealthily, and therefore they could well be considered enemies. Whether they had left that place or not I was determined to find out, because it stood us in hand to know in what force were our neighbors.

We Minute Boys were the sole occupants of the

fort, and if the Tories took it into their heads that we might in time prove dangerous, there was every reason to believe we would speedily be beset.

I talked the matter over with Elias Shendle during the first hour after our arrival at the fort, and before we were fairly settled down. He was of my opinion, that our first duty consisted in ascertaining how many of those whom we had every reason to consider enemies were in the vicinity, and because it would not look well for the captain of a company to *order* one of his men to do a certain piece of work, since he might be charged with not daring to perform it himself, I proposed alone to make what military men would call a reconnaissance.

To this Elias made most emphatic protest, claiming that because of having been given command of the company I had no right to leave it in order to do the work of a scout, and he wound up his argument by declaring that he himself would undertake the work.

Well, the result of it was that as soon as night came Elias crept secretly away, for we were not minded any of our comrades should know of the work in hand, lest they be eager to have a share in what was certainly a hazardous venture, since we knew full well that Wintermoot's people would not hesitate to kill any whom they might find spying upon them.

I went with him to the small gate of the stockade, for it must be remembered that these so-called

forts in the valley were really nothing but block-houses enclosed in a fence of logs, and, watching his opportunity when none was looking, he went out, saying, as he did so:

"I shall be back before sunrise, if I come at all."

"Ay, lad, but you must come!" I cried.

As if seized with a certain timorousness at the intimation in his own words of the danger which was to be faced, he made no reply, and suddenly was swallowed up in the gloom.

Not until he had departed from view did I fully realize how hazardous might be this venture which he was making, and asked myself whether it was warranted.

Such speculations should have been indulged in before he left me, but it must be remembered that I was very far from being a soldier, and too prone to consider first my own wishes and then the advisability of doing this or that thing.

Clambering up on the logs which were fastened inside the stockade perhaps three or four feet below the top, in order that the sentinels might have a secure foothold, I strained my eyes in the direction of that nest of Tories, as if expecting to see some one emerge from the thicket, and then suddenly was like to have cried aloud in surprise, for a dark form came swiftly toward the main gate of the stockade, crouching as if expecting to be followed by a bullet.

"Who's there?" I whispered, leaning over the top of the logs without realizing that I was exposing myself to possible death, and proving that I possessed very little of that caution which the captain of a company should display.

The stranger made no reply, but continued to advance, and again I hailed him, crying out that I would shoot unless he explained his purpose.

Whereupon he halted, throwing himself flat upon the ground, as does one who knows there are enemies on his trail, and asked, in a low, hoarse whisper:

"Who are you?"

"Jonathan Ogden," I replied, "captain of the Minute Boys of Wyoming Valley, and we are holding this fort."

"Let me in! I beg you to let me in!" he cried. "I have twice been within a hand's breadth of death, and the savages are close behind."

As a matter of course, my comrades in the fort had heard this conversation, for we were so lately come as to be on the alert for the lightest token of danger.

Therefore it was I had simply to give the word that the smaller gate be unbarred, at the same moment that I leaped down and stood ready to receive the stranger, as well as any who might take the chance of following him.

All this shows how poor an apology I was for a soldier, since, with more knowledge, I would have

insisted that he give an account of himself, lest I be admitting one who would work us harm.

A single glance at the stranger was sufficient to show, however suspicious I may have been of his intentions, that we had nothing to fear from him.

A lad hardly as old as myself, I should say, and what with long running and terror he was so nearly used up as to be unable to stand erect, but sank to the ground, as if his legs refused longer to perform their office, immediately the gate of the stockade was closed behind him.

I waited while one might have counted twenty, perhaps, for him to gain his breath, and then asked for explanations.

His name was Daniel Hinchman, so he said, and he lived on the slope of the hills two miles or more to the westward of Wintermoot's Fort. He and his sister Esther were alone in their home about an hour before sunset, when five or six Indians, whom he believed to be of the Mohawk tribe, were seen skulking about the dwelling.

Yielding to his sister's entreaties, instead of making any attempt at defending the home, he set out with her, thinking to gain the stockades at Pittstown, although there was no idea in his mind as to how it might be possible for him to cross the river.

Not twenty minutes before coming within sight of our stockade, so he said, the savages suddenly burst upon him, seizing his sister, and one of them

would have cut him down with a hatchet, but that he leaped aside just as the weapon was descending. Then, and I never came to know exactly how, he succeeded in outstripping them, although twice during the flight did he have good proof that the painted fiends were close behind him.

That was the story, as he told it little by little, now choking with emotion as he thought of his sister's fate, and again giving way to passion because he had not uselessly sacrificed his own life in the attempt to save her from captivity.

"You will go with me in search of her, will you not?" he cried, springing to his feet, as if expecting that on the instant we would send out force sufficient to do as he wished, and half a dozen of the more impetuous ones sprang toward him as if ready to join in a pursuit which would have been as reckless as it was useless.

Then, for the first time, did I find it difficult to hold myself as should the captain of a company; but it was not to be expected that these lads, who called themselves Minute Boys, could, on hearing such a story as had just been told, realize all the conditions and possibilities. Even to this day I am unable to say why it was that suddenly the true situation presented itself to me, and in reply to their clamors that the gate be opened at once, I made reply:

"We have been sent here, lads, to hold this fort so long as may be against those who would do

murder in the valley. By leaving our post of duty in order to aid one person, we are putting in jeopardy a thousand, mayhap, who depend upon our vigilance."

"But are we to stand here idle while those red wolves carry into captivity one of our neighbors?" Giles March, a member of the company, cried, angrily.

And I replied as hotly as he had spoken:

"What chance would we have if all of us went out in pursuit this moment? Think you, Giles March, that we are any match in woodcraft for those who have done this thing? In the darkness we could never find the trail, and I question if Daniel Hinchman is able to lead you to the place where his sister was taken."

"And because there is a chance we may not succeed, you, calling yourself the captain of this company, count on staying here behind a stockade?" Giles cried, passionately, and his words rankled in my heart, for it was much the same as if he had called me a coward.

"Because I am the captain of this company, it is my duty to hold you all here within the fort, at least, until another day shall come. Even at this moment is Elias Shendle trying to make his way toward Wintermoot's Fort, and we know beyond a peradventure that he must be nearabout where the Mohawks are, in ignorance of their presence. He is the dearest friend I have in the valley, and

yet I would neither go myself, nor allow one of you, to warn him of the danger, because of the duty we owe the people who sent us here."

"And what may Elias Shendle be doing outside the stockade?" Giles March asked, angrily.

I could do no less at that time than explain why the lad had gone, else might I have had a mutiny on my hands before I was well in command of a company which, I hoped, would one day perform great deeds in behalf of their relatives and friends.

Immediately, and as I might have expected, there was a conflict of opinions boldly expressed as to the wisdom of weakening our small company by sending out scouts, and, to my dismay, I realized that at the very moment when it was needed that we exercise the utmost vigilance, and carry ourselves like soldiers so nearly as might be, was a mutiny brewing.

Nearly half the company were in favor of going out immediately with Daniel Hinchman to search for the savages, who could conceal themselves as quickly and as thoroughly as a squirrel might in a dead oak, and a goodly portion of the remainder were becoming timorous, or so it seemed to me, because Elias had left us.

At that moment I was convinced that the Minute Boys of the Wyoming Valley could not be kept together as an organization while I remained at its head, and I could have cried with vexation because this project of mine was like to come to so

speedy an end, through my inability to hold the lads to their duty as I should have done.

Daniel Hinchman, quite naturally, urged eagerly that we go out in search of his sister, and his entreaties, to which, because of the grief in his heart, I could make no protest, only served to add fuel to the flame of insubordination which had been kindled so quickly.

Giles March, quick to see how this poor, grieving lad was weakening my authority, urged his prayers, and I believe of a verity that, had I delayed one full moment longer, the fort would have been abandoned, some to follow Daniel, and others to set out for their homes, believing we were all too weak to perform the work which had been undertaken.

The anger which possessed me at that instant was so overpowering I gave no heed whatsoever to the fact that I was talking to friends; I saw before me only those reckless spirits who would imperil all the settlers in the valley, simply because of not being willing to wait and understand the situation, and, priming my musket, I leaped in front of the small gate, where I would be within a dozen paces of whosoever should attempt to unbar the main entrance, as I cried:

"So true as I live, I will shoot, making every effort to kill, the lad who shall attempt to leave this stockade on any pretext whatsoever! You are to remain here at least one hour, that you may have time in which to consider fully the situation, and

then, if so be you are minded to desert the post of duty at the very moment when your best efforts are needed, I will say that I no longer claim, nor deserve the right, to stand as your captain."

"And in an hour my sister will have been carried so far away that there can be no possibility of overtaking her!" Daniel Hinchman shouted, passionately.

"In an hour your sister will be at Wintermoot's Fort, if those who seized her were, as you believe, Mohawks!" I cried, the idea coming into my mind like a flash that whatsoever of savages were in that vicinity must be in league with those of the Tory nest.

I could see that this shot told on Giles March, for his voice, which had been loud and angry, was lowered on the instant, and, thinking to follow up the advantage, if such it was, I said to them much like this:

"Elias Shendle is risking his life to learn that which it is necessary you should know in order to keep yourselves alive, for, if the rumors be true that a number of white men and Indians have lately gained entrance to Wintermoot's, then do we stand more than a good chance of being attacked. Wait until he makes his report. Wait until we know how much of danger menaces us and those whom we are trying to guard. Think of what would be said in your homes if you came there hotfoot in the night, crying out that you had deserted because

your captain refused to allow you to go in a useless effort to trail savages in the darkness! Do you fancy they would believe you returned because of that, or on account of having grown so timorous, and your hearts had turned so white, you no longer dared to stand in a place of danger?"

I believe it was that which put an end for the time being to the mutinous spirit which had been aroused so suddenly. At all events, Giles March ceased his tongue-wagging, but I was disturbed because the others gathered here and there in little knots, conversing in whispers lest I should overhear, and I was no longer proud, as I had been, of calling myself captain of the Minute Boys of the Wyoming Valley.

Virtually left alone, I debated as to what my next move should be, but realized, fortunately, that having said none should go out, I must, so long as I remained in command, see that such order was obeyed. Therefore, to the end that I might get the first glimpse of Elias when he returned, I climbed up to the watcher's post above the gate, where I could keep an eye on those inside, as well as whosoever might come from the outside, and there I stood during three hours or more, the only sentinel, at a time when every one of us should have had his eyes and ears open.

If the Indians were sufficiently bold to make an attack upon Daniel Hinchman and his sister so near the settlement, then were they prepared, if there was

any show of success, to come against us who were trying to hold the fort.

The hour of respite which I had asked for went by, and yet none came to demand that I give up the office of captain, therefore did it seem as if one danger was well-nigh passed, yet I remained as keenly on the alert as to what my comrades might do, as to the possible movements of the enemy.

It was near to midnight before any member of the company gave signs of trusting in my plan, and then two or three of them came up on the stockade, proposing to share with me the watch, whereupon I said, with more of temper than was seemly:

"If you are ready to obey orders, as you should be after having agreed to play the part of soldiers, then I am willing you go on duty."

Perhaps half of our number heartily declared their confidence in me, and voluntarily stationed themselves at different places around the stockade on guard; but there was yet the dangerous element, or so it seemed to me, who, because of their silence, much the same as proclaimed that they were yet at odds with my plan, and this gave me more than a little uneasiness.

I remained on duty near the gate throughout all that long night, watching and praying, oh, so earnestly, for the coming of Elias; but when the sun showed his face once more, our comrade was yet absent, and there could be but one reason for his delay.

CHAPTER II.

THE SIEGE

THERE were no signs of insubordination to be seen in the faces of my comrades when the new day had come, and Elias Shendle was yet absent.

Instead of setting themselves at odds with me, as had been the case a few hours previous, they gathered around near where I yet remained as sentinel, with anxiety written plainly on their faces, awaiting some word.

Daniel Hinchman, with every cause for sorrow, — and my heart truly ached for the lad at that moment, — had evidently come to understand what folly it would have been for us to have made any attempt at following those who had captured his sister, and I fancied he was struggling to repress his grief that he might seem the more ready to aid us in case it should become necessary.

Giles March was no longer clamoring to be led out of the stockade; he knew as well as did I what the continued absence of Elias portended, and even in that time of mental distress I secretly rejoiced because the lad, who had given such free rein to

his tongue, was come to the length of his rope for the time being.

As a matter of course, I was in much the same condition of mind as Giles, finding it impossible to answer the question which must be settled without delay. Should we make any attempt at learning of our comrade's whereabouts, or wait longer in the poor hope that he might yet come?

The temptation to give these comrades of mine, who had been so mutinously inclined but a short time before, an opportunity of settling the matter themselves was too strong to be resisted, and, leaping down from the stockade, I asked:

"What shall be done now, lads? You know as much of the situation as do I. Elias promised to be back by sunrise if he was alive. His only purpose in going out was to learn whatsoever he might concerning the situation at Wintermoot's Fort, and it seems to me most probable he has fallen into the clutches of those who made a prisoner of Daniel Hinchman's sister. Shall we wait here in ignorance, or weaken the defence of this stockade by sending out scouts?"

For a full moment no one made any reply, and then it was Giles March who, much to my surprise, said meekly:

"It is for you to say, Jonathan Ogden. We have come to see wherein we made fools of ourselves last night. It is you who are the captain,

and I dare pledge myself that none of us will again question whatsoever you may say."

Although the answer pleased me, I was disappointed, having hoped it might be possible some of them would make such a suggestion or proposition as would give me an idea, and I could do no less than admit my perplexity.

"In the first place, it is absolutely necessary that at least four sentinels be placed on the walls, for we know with good reason that the enemy are close around. After that has been done, it may be we can hit upon the right plan of action; but just now I consider myself unable to say what it should be."

"Who shall go on duty?" Giles asked, and I replied:

"Name them yourself; while Elias is away, you shall act in his place."

Giles lost no time in stationing four lads on the wall, with instructions to keep careful watch upon the surrounding forest, ever bearing in mind that it was likely a force of Indians might be creeping upon us, and then he returned near the main gate, where we stood awaiting him.

By this time I had come to understand that we were playing the part of simples by remaining inside the stockade, wholly ignorant of what might be going on around us, and I said sharply, as if doubting the sincerity of my comrades:

"You have agreed that matters shall go to my

liking while I hold command of what we call the Minute Boys."

To this Giles assented emphatically, whereupon I said decidedly:

"You are to remain here with no less than four lads on the watch all the time. I am going out to learn whether there be any danger of an attack."

"It is for one of us to do that," Giles said, quickly, and then I understood how brave the lad was, for he was jealous that I should incur greater danger than himself.

"You shall remain, Giles, until six hours have passed, and if I have not returned, come in search of me, leaving whosoever you will in charge of the company. Remember, lads, that we are to hold this stockade so long as life shall last, for only by fighting until the final moment can we aid those who are depending upon our loyalty to them."

Giles would have spoken again, but, as if he remembered the pledge just made, held his peace, and I went into the stockade for as much of corn bread as would serve for my breakfast. There was no need of taking more than that amount, for, if I returned not by noon, I would never again need food.

Having made ready, I went toward the small gate, and there stopped to take Giles by the hand, as I said:

"The greatest danger which threatens lies between here and Wintermoot's in as straight a line

as the crow flies. I am counting only on going there before I return, therefore, if it becomes necessary to search for me, you need not spend very much time in the hunt."

My hand was on the bar of the gate to raise it from its place, when the lad who was stationed on the west side of the stockade discharged his musket, and a sharp cry from the thicket directly in front of him told that the missile had found its target.

The lad who had fired leaped down in order that he might reload his weapon without giving an opportunity for a shot to those who were on the outside, and, running up to him, I asked, hurriedly:

"Was it red man or white?"

"Red," he replied, "and, unless I mistake, there were three others near by."

Beckoning to four of the lads who stood nearest, I bade them mount the wall, but urged that they take care before shooting, lest Elias be making an effort to gain the stockade, and then I stationed the rest of the company on the different sides of the fortification, knowing that, if an attack by the Indians was about to be made, they were more like to come from all quarters at the same moment.

Giles was the only member of the company whom I had not stationed, and he stood moodily near the main entrance, as if disgruntled because I had seemingly overlooked him.

The frown left his face very quickly, however, when I said, clapping him on the shoulder:

"It is for you and me, Giles, to be certain the others do their duty faithfully. We will make the round of the stockade, you starting toward the east and I the west, until something more is known of the foe. Don't expose yourself foolishly, for it will be a serious matter indeed when one of our small company is disabled."

Then we clambered up on the logs which gave us footing all the way around the enclosure, and had hardly more than shown ourselves when a bullet whistled past Giles's head, so near that he clapped his hand to his cheek, believing he had been wounded. My heart sank within me, for now I knew beyond a question that the Indians, or the Tories, or both, had set about capturing Jenkins's Fort, to the end that it might not shelter those who were in position to give warning of the doings at Wintermoot's.

Strain our eyes as we might, it was not possible to distinguish any form amid the foliage where the tiny curl of smoke was rising above the leaves to tell of the whereabouts of him who had fired, and I said bitterly to myself, unconscious of giving breath to the words:

"They count on regularly besieging the place and starving us out. It won't be a long job, for our provisions are none too abundant."

I had dropped to my knees while speaking, with my face pressed against the aperture left where two logs were joined together, and Giles, crouching by

my side, his eyes fixed upon the underbrush directly in front of us, said grimly:

"We have enough in plenty for two days; by halving that, we can hold out four, and should be able to get along on wind for two more, making six. Within that time some one should come from Forty Fort, or thereabouts, to learn how we are faring."

"Ay, so they should, Giles, if it be possible, but in case those who hold Wintermoot's are determined on gaining possession of this place, they will take good care no succor comes from that direction."

Then a shot rang out from the north side of the stockade, and there could no longer be any question but that my worst fears were to be realized.

Leaping to the ground, I ran across the enclosure until I came to where the shot had been fired, and there asked if they had seen their target distinctly.

"Ay, enough to tell us that it was an Indian, but the bullet went wide of its mark," one of the lads replied. "We must be regularly surrounded, and the red villains don't propose to show themselves any more than may be absolutely necessary in order to keep us fairly well in view."

Disheartening as were those words, they cheered me in a certain measure, for I began to realize that those who menaced us must have been in their present position some time before sunrise, and it was possible that Elias, succeeding in making his way through the lines when he started out, had found

himself unable to return. He might be at that moment trying to gain an entrance.

It is needless to make any attempt at describing all that occurred during the long day which followed, for it would be but to repeat the words again and again.

We kept vigilant watch, rewarded now and then by getting a shot at some painted fiend who incautiously exposed himself, and again being fired upon, but without result. Only twice before sunset did we have fair proof that our bullets had taken effect, and then, as in the first case, it was but a cry of pain which might more reasonably have been caused by a slight wound than a deadly one.

We saw no white man, and this encouraged both Giles and myself, for, if the Indians were of the Mohawk tribe, they would not continue a siege very long, unless there were Tories near at hand to hold them to their work.

When night came Giles and I took careful account of the provisions, fearing less than we had supposed was on hand, and, that done, we told off five of the party with orders that they lie down at once to sleep, for up to this time all had remained awake at least thirty-six hours.

"We will divide the company into parties of four or five, that each may get an hour's rest in turn," I said to Giles, "and those who remain longest on duty must be kept constantly moving about, lest

their eyes close despite their will. And now is it in your mind that we had best sit here idle?"

He looked at me questioningly and in surprise, whereat I continued:

"It is my belief that Elias may be trying to gain entrance here, and I beg that you, so long as is possible without rest, remain on the stockade just over the small gate, watching for him. I am going out."

"To what end?" he asked.

"In the hope of finding him, and to learn the situation of affairs at Wintermoot's. Failing in that, to carry word to our friends farther down the valley of what is being done here. Thus far we have escaped injury; but, in case they press us hard, it is not probable that we have such good luck during the next four and twenty hours."

I had expected Giles would protest; but, to my surprise and delight, he replied, quietly:

"If you think it best that you go rather than I, do so, yet I would rather take the venture myself, although I question whether the danger be greater outside than in."

I took him by the hand, and did not speak. It was as if, during the past four and twenty hours, he and I had ceased to be lads, and were become men, — men who were entrusted with the defence of the women and the aged in the poorly fortified blockhouses in the valley below us.

I am not minded that whomsoever reads these

words shall believe I was eager to encounter danger, therefore do I set it down that there was a great fear in my heart as I unbarred the gate and stepped out, hearing Giles replace the fastenings which separated me from my comrades.

However timorous one may be, he does not linger long in such a place as I then was, for it stood to reason there were many pairs of sharp eyes fixed on this particular portion of the stockade, and, lying flat on my stomach, I began the advance, which needed to be slow and cautious if one would continue it many moments.

Before having gotten fifty yards away, following the line of the river at about an hundred paces from it, I suddenly came upon an Indian leaning against a tree as if half-asleep.

It might have been possible to have struck a blow that would have carried him out of this world; but the chances were that, in making such an attempt, I would bring his fellows down upon me, and, therefore, hardly daring to breathe lest he should be aware of my neighborhood, I made such a détour as soon left him behind me.

Then half an hour more of creeping and stopping to listen, suspicious of every leaf that was stirred by the wind, and after having gone, so nearly as I could judge, a mile in distance, I was literally paralyzed with fear when I laid my hand squarely upon the leg of a man.

In an instant he had kicked back with such force

that the breath was knocked out of me, and, before I could recover, he was upon my back, clutching me by the throat with a grip which threatened soon to put an end to my struggles.

It was impossible for me to draw my knife, and the musket which I gripped in my right hand was useless at such a time. My brain was in a whirl, and consciousness rapidly deserting me when, suddenly, the iron grip upon my throat was loosened, as I heard dimly the whisper:

"Who are you?"

Then I understood who was my assailant, and it was with difficulty I prevented myself from crying aloud with joy, for I knew now that I had thus inadvertently come upon Elias.

It was not needed that I should reply to the question, for, passing his hand quickly over my face, he knew who I was, and throwing himself by my side, whispered:

"What are you doing here? Have they taken the fort?"

I explained in as few words as possible why I had ventured forth, and in turn asked the reason for his failing to come back within the time agreed upon.

"The stockade was all surrounded when I left, and since noon have I been trying to have speech with you. Once I got within sight of the fort, but was obliged to fall back when an additional force was sent up from Wintermoot's."

"Did you get anywhere near the nest of Tories?"

"Ay, and because they evidently are not fearing any interference from the people of the valley, I had good opportunity to see what was going on. I should say no less than an hundred white men in the uniform of Johnson Greens are there, and between the stockade and the river can be seen twenty or more Indian lodges, which will give you an idea of how many redskins Butler has gathered to begin the work of destruction hereabout. I have heard shots enough from around our fort to tell me that you must have, by this time, some idea of where the enemy are."

"I know that a goodly number of them are outside Fort Jenkins, and it looks to me much as if they counted on laying regular siege to the place," I replied, bitterly; "but as to how many may be nearabout, we have no knowledge."

"I believe a full half the force of Indians from Wintermoot's are there," Elias replied. "Judging from the trouble I had in getting anywhere near the main gate, it seemed to me that no less than two hundred were in front of the stockade. How did you get out, and why are you come?"

I replied to the questions, and began to think myself fortunate in having gotten through the lines of the enemy with so little difficulty. Elias was a better hand at such work than I, and if he had found it impossible to open communication with us

inside the stockade, then was I lucky in not having come to grief before I chanced upon him.

"Then since you came out only to learn where the enemy might be found, and how many there were of them near Wintermoot's, you will go back with me?" Elias said, questioningly, and straightway I told him about the capture of Esther Hinchman, asking if he saw any evidences that the Indians in camp had a prisoner with them.

"There might have been a dozen in the lodges, and I remain in ignorance of the fact because of not looking for anything of that kind," Elias replied, in a tone of vexation and doubt, as if the matter needed no discussion. "Of course we must retrace our steps at once."

"Meaning that you think we might aid her if she was held by the red villains?" I asked, and he replied, promptly:

"Meaning that we'd have a try for it, of course. The lads in the fort are as well off as they would be if we were with them, therefore I don't see how we can help turning back, but I'd be in better shape for the work if I had something besides wind in my stomach."

Now it was I remembered that when Elias left the stockade he had neglected to take any food with him, believing he would either be taken prisoner, or succeed in returning within a few hours. Although my store of provision was wofully small, consisting of only so much corn bread as could be

carried in the pocket of my hunting shirt, I divided it with him, and while we were eating spoke of the necessity as it seemed to me, of sending some word down the valley concerning what was going on at Fort Jenkins, as well as what we knew regarding the situation at Wintermoot's.

Elias was of my mind concerning the necessity of so doing, but I understood plainly that he was not inclined to volunteer for such a mission. In fact, he said decidedly that if a message was to be sent, some one of the lads inside the stockade, of whose courage we might be in doubt, could best be spared at such a time when it seemed probable an attack was imminent.

But I reminded him that it might be impossible, and certainly would require a great expenditure of time, to seek for some other messenger than one of us two who were already beyond the enemy's lines.

Well, because of the darkness, when it would be impossible to do much spying upon the enemy after we were come in the vicinity of Wintermoot's, we spent considerable time in the thicket talking of this or of that, and chiefly regarding the show of insubordination which was displayed shortly after he went out on the scout.

It matters little what we said, although to us the conversation was of deepest import, since it was the foreshadowing of what we might expect when the villainous Col. John Butler began his work of butchery upon almost defenceless people,

claiming that he was no more than waging legitimate warfare.

Young in experience though we were, it was possible for us to understand full well that on account of the quarrels which we of the valley had had concerning the ownership of the land, and also because of the interferences of Connecticut in our affairs, were we in greater peril than any other cluster of settlements in the colonies, owing to the greater number of Tories as compared with the loyal people.

It must not be supposed, however, that we spent any very great amount of time chewing over those questions which had caused bloodshed long before the colonists decided to array themselves against the king, but the greater portion of our talk was regarding what we might be able to do at Jenkins's Fort, in event of a pitched battle, when the odds were like to be heavy against us.

When the day was within an hour of breaking we began our advance toward Wintermoot's, moving with such caution that the gray light of morning had dispersed the darkness as we were come within sight of, but at a respectful distance from, the stockade, wherein were probably gathered those who were minded to lay waste all the little settlements in our beautiful valley.

At this early hour no one was stirring within the fort, and because of having halted on a slight eleva-

tion of land it was possible for us to see everything within the enclosure.

Outside, however, toward the river, where had been put up the lodges of the savages, as if to effect a permanent settlement, we could see that the Indians were all astir, and now and then one would set off at a rapid pace in the direction of Jenkins's Fort, or again, a runner would return, as if bringing some intelligence from those who menaced the Minute Boys of Wyoming Valley.

"It is the Indians who are entrusted with the task of capturing the fort," Elias whispered, as we gazed. "The Tories will take no hand in the work unless it should become necessary — at least, that is my way of figuring it."

"There is no good reason why we should speculate upon the future," I said, irritably, made nervous by the desire to return to my comrades. "Let us finish our business here as soon as may be. If Esther Hinchman is held prisoner by those scoundrels, we should be able to get some glimpse of her before very long, for I can't believe they think it necessary to guard her closely."

We were concealed within the thicket at a point where there was the least likelihood of our being come upon through accident by the enemy, and, therefore, felt reasonably secure. During the quarrels between the several claimants for Wyoming, even the youngest lads had become accustomed to danger, and this I say in order that it may be the

better understood why Elias and I could thus take care of ourselves in such a situation as we then were. In fact, for as long a time as I could remember, we had been ever on the lookout for a foe, and were almost as skilful at hiding ourselves in the wilderness as are the wild things.

Within an hour from the time of our arrival the work was accomplished, so far as learning whether Esther Hinchman was held a prisoner by those savages who were under command of Col. John Butler, for we saw a white girl moving timidly about, showing by every movement that she was a stranger to the place and the people who surrounded her.

"I reckon this portion of the task is the same as finished," Elias said, after we had watched the poor girl a few moments, "and now comes the question as to whether you are still determined that one of us — which will, of course, be me — must go down the valley, and give information of what is happening hereabouts."

I had already made up my mind as to that, and was determined there should be no discussion.

"Yes, you are to go, Elias," I said, in a tone of one who has well considered the matter, "and the sooner you set off the better. There will be no necessity of travelling farther than Forty Fort, and once you have arrived there, see to it that the people understand how great is the danger which menaces. It is better that you put it too strongly,

rather than allow them to believe there is a chance they may not be attacked."

"And after that has been done?" he asked.

"Come back to Jenkins's Fort as soon as possible, for you know that we shall need you, unless, peradventure, we are by that time past all need of human help."

Elias half turned as if to speak, then quickly, with a gesture of impatience, he turned his face in the direction I would have him go, gliding through the thicket on a course which would take him considerably to the westward of Wintermoot's, and making no more noise than might have been caused by a squirrel.

CHAPTER III.

SIMON BARTLETT

After Elias had departed from view, I wasted no more time in watching the red sneaks who had counted on satisfying their thirst for blood by answering John Butler's call to what he claimed to be civilized warfare, but began the journey toward our stockade, knowing full well the danger of moving carelessly or rapidly.

There was in my mind a determination to do something toward the rescue of that poor girl who was eating her heart out in the lodges of the Indians, if it should be decided by the members of our company that two or three could be spared to accompany me in the venture. I was turning all this over in my mind as I advanced pace by pace, keeping sharp watch for the slightest unusual movement of the foliage ahead of me, and listening intently to every noise, the cause of which I might not be absolutely certain.

Perhaps half an hour passed, and already I began to believe it would be possible for us Minute Boys to effect a rescue, when it suddenly became apparent

that not very far behind me some person was moving quite as cautiously as myself.

As a matter of course it was absolutely essential I should know who this stranger might be, and, halting within a dense clump of cedars, I waited, breathlessly, finding it difficult to repress a cry of astonishment when he finally came into view, peering cautiously around in a manner which told that he understood full well the dangers to be encountered.

It was Simon Bartlett, an old man of near seventy, from Wilkesbarre, whom I knew full well as one being nigh crippled with rheumatism, but having a heart so full of courage that in times of stern necessity he could so far defy bodily ailment as to do the work of half a dozen men.

As I stepped out in front of him he had his musket to his shoulder in a twinkling, but lowered it quickly, as he asked, in a whisper:

"What has happened at Jenkins's Fort, lad, that you are here?"

Before answering him I put the question:

"Did you not meet Elias Shendle during this past half-hour?"

He shook his head.

"The lad left me hardly more than thirty minutes ago, to carry to Forty Fort the information that we at the stockade are the same as besieged. There are an hundred or more Indians close around, and

so many Tories at Wintermoot's that it seems positive we of the valley are marked out as victims."

I believe the information which I gave Master Bartlett was no more alarming than he had anticipated, for instead of making any ado, he said, quietly:

"We had come to believe from rumors which lately arrived that mischief was brewing, and in order to know exactly what we might expect, I took upon myself the task of visiting you lads."

"And right glad will the members of the company be to see you, Master Bartlett, for there is none in all the valley who could give so much aid. I believe of a verity the mere fact of your entering the stockade will renew their courage."

"Are they growing timorous, then?" the old man asked.

"Not to the extent of showing it, Master Bartlett; but you must remember that the Minute Boys are young at this business which John Butler calls war, and it would not be surprising if more than one felt a tremor of fear at knowing that all the miserable horde from Johnson Hall were assembling here."

"Ay, lad, true," the old man said, half to himself, and he added, in a louder tone, "Think you it will be possible to hold your own, in case of an attack?"

"That you should be better able to judge than I, Master Bartlett. The stockade is larger. With

Elias gone, we number but twenty-one, and if a determined attack be made on all sides, then of a verity must we go under; but, I pledge you this, that unless the people in the settlement below can have ample warning of what may be in store for them, we shall fight without thought of preserving our own lives, in the hope of saving them."

"That's the right kind of talk, lad, and it does me good in these times when there are so many croaking as to the impossiblity of our standing against those who will come down on us. I will go into the fort with you, since Elias Shendle is doing that which I would have done," and he started on, I detaining him only long enough to explain the danger which lay before us.

From this moment, and until we were come within sight of the stockade, neither he nor I spoke. There was so much of difficulty in the task that we could not afford to spend any moments in conversation, and I believe we traversed not less than six miles in making a distance of no more than two, so many détours were we forced to make, in order to avoid the red scouts who were flitting here, there, and everywhere, as it seemed, through the forest. Never before had I seen so many Indians in such a small extent of territory, and all of them on the war-path.

That we did succeed in getting within view of the stockade without an encounter, now seems to me almost marvellous; but it was destined that

"I WAS ABLE TO GET A GRIP UPON THE NAKED MURDERER'S THROAT.'

when we believed the more perilous portion of the enterprise was past, did the dangers thicken.

In my eagerness to make certain the Minute Boys were not in more danger than at the time of my leaving them, I pressed forward eagerly to get a clear view of the fortification through the foliage, counting on the possibility of attracting the attention of those on guard, and, just as I was parting the leaves in front of me, a sharp ray of light, as if glinted from a surface of steel, caught my eye.

Instinctively, although not realizing all the peril, I swerved aside, catching in my left hand the trunk of a sapling, swinging half around and coming up erect, only to find myself facing a venomous Mohawk, who had raised his hatchet to strike.

In another instant, despite the fact that I had escaped his first blow, he would have stricken me down, and this I realized, therefore, bending my body ever so slightly, I darted in to catch him under the arms, as we lads were wont to do while wrestling.

How I might dispose of him, or he of me, after that, did not come into my calculations, for the very good reason that there was no time in which to reason out the matter. The fellow was thrown off his guard for an instant by my unexpected and unusual movement, and fortune so far favored me that I was able to get a grip upon the naked murderer's throat in such a fashion that he could not cry out.

I hope it will never be my ill luck to have again such a struggle as ensued.

While battling for very life, and knowing that the slightest careless movement would give him an opportunity to brain me, I had sense enough to realize that the noise of the struggle would bring to his aid a score or more of his fellows. Therefore was I hampered in my efforts because I durst not work as I otherwise would, whilst he, on his part, was aiming to give the alarm, threshing here and there with his feet in the hope that some of those near about might hear him, and all the while I wondered where Simon Bartlett could be.

The only hold which the fellow could get upon me was around my back, and he hugged as does a bear, striving to crush in my ribs, until the sense of suffocation which came upon me was so nearly overpowering that had it been only my life which was in the balance I must have given up the struggle before it was well begun.

Not many seconds did we stand upright in this fight which could end only in the death of one; soon we were on the ground, he uppermost, but I knowing that the advantage was mine, because of his protruding tongue and eyeballs, which seemed starting from their sockets.

How long we fought there I am unable to say. It seemed to me a full hour was spent, when most likely no more than three minutes had passed, and during all this time, as I afterward learned, Mas-

ter Bartlett was doing his utmost to get in a blow with his knife, but finding it difficult to do so without danger of wounding me.

Then, at the very moment when I believed victory lay with the Mohawk, and that I was even on the borders of the Beyond, I felt the sinewy frame suddenly relax, the head which had been bent toward me in the effort to weaken the hold upon his throat fell back, as a stream of warm blood covered my breast.

Simon Bartlett had thrust his knife in through the savage's back, and the fight was over.

Yes, the fight was over; but even while I struggled to my feet, trying to regain the breath which had been nearly forced from my body, I realized that although we had come off victorious in this encounter, our peril had been increased tenfold, for the body of the Indian would unquestionably soon be found by his fellows, and then must be known the fact that some of our company were outside the stockade, after which our doom was certain.

On the heels of this thought came another, which was, that by killing this villainous Mohawk had we put in greater jeopardy Elias Shendle, for even though Master Bartlett and I succeeded in gaining the stockade, the besiegers would be more keenly on the alert than before, while Elias, believing matters to be as when he left, would find himself confronted by death, when the only mercy he could

hope to receive would be that it came speedily, while he was fighting.

However, the deed was done, and no good could come of my conjuring up all the possibilities of trouble.

We must get into the fort now without delay, or else abandon our efforts to do so, in which case rapid retreat would be necessary.

It was not in my mind, however, to leave the vicinity of Fort Jenkins while it was possible to remain, and believing the danger to be less if we made a bold stroke, I said hurriedly to Master Bartlett:

"If the Indians nearabout have not already heard the noise of the fight, they will soon come upon this fellow's body, and then are we lost beyond hope; therefore I propose that you and I take to our heels now, running with all swiftness toward the main entrance, on the chances that the sentinels will see us and open the gate. Of course we stand the risk of being shot down; but that, in my mind, is no less if we stay here trying to get across the cleared space secretly."

"It shall be as you say, lad," the old man replied, grimly. "I am ready to take my chances of running as fast as you."

Without waiting for further converse, for it seemed to me that even the seconds were precious just then, I started at full speed across the space which had been cleared immediately in front of the

main entrance to the stockade, and on seeing Giles March standing sentinel directly over the gate, it seemed as if fortune was smiling on us.

Master Bartlett, half-crippled though he was, held even pace with me; but when the race was a little more than two-thirds run, and I saw that the small gate was being opened cautiously, the report of a musket rang out almost at the same instant that I heard a bullet whistle past my ears. Then came another, and another, and in a twinkling it was as if all the thicket surrounding the stockade was alive with the crackling of musketry.

Strangely enough, I gave no heed to the possibility of death at that moment when it lurked close behind me, but said to myself, as if it were something in the nature of a jest:

"Elias Shendle's arithmetic is strangely out of sorts when he claims that there are but an hundred Indians nearabout, for of a verity twice that number of shots have already been fired."

Then, turning my head ever so slightly, I looked to see if Master Bartlett was still on his feet, fearing lest he had been stricken down, and the old man was close at my heels, smiling, if you please, because we had thus far run the gauntlet in safety.

It heartened me wondrously to hear him cry:

"They need practice at a target, lad, before they shoot at moving game."

Then, ere one could have counted ten, we were safe within the stockade, and I gripping Giles

March's hand, as if he and I had both come from our graves to meet each other.

"It was a narrow shave," one of the lads who crowded around us said, and Master Bartlett replied with a laugh:

"Ay, narrow, if you please, but yet margin enough and to spare, since we are here sound of body, although a little lacking in wind."

And thus did the old man come out from the race with death, having a jest upon his lips, even as I have known him in later days when the peril was equally great.

I had returned none too soon, so Giles March told me when we stood apart from the others that I might learn what had happened during my absence.

The lads were growing faint-hearted, having come to understand full well the force which menaced from the outside, and knowing that the slightest relaxation of vigilance meant a decided advantage to the enemy.

It could not be otherwise than disheartening to know that possibly all the strength which the Tories could muster was about to be directed upon us, and our number so small that, even though each lad proved to be a host in himself, we were all too few to defend the stockade at every point.

"There are four or five among us whose hearts have grown faint," Giles said, "and unless their courage can be brought up to the sticking-point,

there is a fear in my heart that they will make the others timorous."

"And yet what may we do, Giles?" I asked, in perplexity. "We cannot put blood in veins that are filled with milk."

"I believe it were better that we sent them away. To my mind the company would be stronger without them."

"Unless they be lads who are well versed in woodcraft, the chances of their getting away are exceeding small," I replied, and, while I was describing to him what I had seen, both in company with Elias and while returning with Master Bartlett, the old man joined us.

"You lads are in a position where open battle is to be preferred, rather than this constant nagging by bullets whenever a head is shown above the stockade," he said, as if thinking aloud, and so much confidence did I have in his courage and judgment that I repeated what Giles had told me, whereupon he said gravely:

"I believe in looking bad matters squarely in the face, and, judging from what has been seen, your plight is likely to continue as it has been until Butler's gang makes a direct assault. You should have more of a force here."

"Very true, Master Bartlett," I replied, with a laugh, in which was no mirth, "and mayhap you will be able to tell us how our numbers can be increased? There are not enough men, counting the

cripples, in all the valley to defend the blockhouses which are scattered from here to Wilkesbarre, therefore how may we expect that any will come to us?"

"It would be wiser for them to abandon some of the stockades lower down, in order to hold this one, where the heaviest fighting will come, and it may be that those to whom Elias Shendle speaks will understand such to be the case."

"I am not minded to build my hopes on getting reinforcements," I replied, and then, because the subject was not heartening, I begged the old man to tell us what had been done by our people.

He made a long story out of little, and yet in that little was considerable meat.

In the first place, the people at Wilkesbarre had information that General Schuyler had written a letter to the Congress, detailing the situation and forecasting the probabilities, urging that such recruits in the American army as came from Wyoming be allowed to return on furlough, in order to defend their homes, but thus far no attention had been paid to the communication.

The women of the valley, knowing well all the needs, and how put to it we were for ammunition, had taken it upon themselves not only to plant the gardens and till the farms, but to make gunpowder for the several garrisons. They had taken up the floors of their houses, dug out the earth, and put in casks in order to make saltpetre. Then mixing charcoal and sulphur with it, and grinding the whole

in a small mill which Master Hollenback had brought, made such powder as we could use; but it fouled the guns so badly that not above a dozen charges might be fired without cleaning the weapons.

Word was also received that John Butler had gathered two companies of Tory rangers, a detachment of Johnson's Royal Greens, and from five to six hundred Indians, who were advancing from Niagara, intending to overrun the valley. The men already at Wintermoot's were probably the advance of this large army.

To oppose this force, Giles and I knew full well that, taking every man in the valley who could fire a musket, we would not be able to raise more than two hundred at the most.

It was a situation of affairs such as might daunt even the bravest spirits, and we Minute Boys, ignorant of all the rules of warfare, a mere handful, as compared with the Indians which already surrounded us, were expected to hold in check the Tories and savages which Butler was leading against us.

"It is not well, Master Bartlett, that you should tell the others what we have just heard," Giles March said, gravely, when the old man had come to an end of his budget of news. "I had thought my heart stout enough to keep me behind these logs so long as life remained, believing I might aid those of my own blood in the valley; but, knowing what may be coming against us, I understand now

how vain it will be. Those who are weak-hearted already are like to make such plaint that a retreat will be begun before the battle is commenced."

Then it was that Master Bartlett set about trying to hearten us, saying that it was not impossible the Congress, learning what was being done, would take immediate steps to send three or four companies — perhaps a regiment — to aid us. He also suggested that possibly John Butler intended to strike a blow elsewhere rather than at our valley, and there might have been some chance for hope in this last had we not known that many of the Tories were members of the Susquehanna Company, who, by shedding blood now, might establish firmly their claims upon the land.

However heavy my heart had grown since Master Bartlett told us so much regarding the situation outside, I was not minded that the Minute Boys should relax their vigilance in the slightest degree, for we would hold Jenkins's Fort as long as might be, forcing the enemy to pay the largest possible price in blood for whatsoever of advantage he gained over us.

When Giles and I had made the round of the stockade to learn if every lad was doing his duty, we returned to where Master Bartlett awaited us, and then I asked if he believed it possible or advisable for us to make any attempt at rescuing Esther Hinchman, detailing the plans which had already been formed in my mind.

The old man was unwilling to give a direct opinion; but that he favored something of the kind both Giles and I understood when he said:

"Whatsoever you do must be done quickly, lad, before the enemy has gotten ready to make an attack upon the fort. Nothing can be accomplished by force, and, therefore, a small number only should be sent out, — say, two or three. I am ready to do my share of the work; the brother of the girl had, perhaps, better be made one of the party, and the third man can be of your own choice."

"If you had the task in hand, Master Bartlett, when would you set out?" I asked, and he replied, promptly:

"As soon as the sun has set."

"It should be my right to name the third member of the party," Giles March said, and I knew what was in his mind, but did not settle the matter then, for I was hoping there might be some change in affairs which would give me the privilege of going with Master Bartlett, therefore turned the conversation by speaking of the possibility that we might be able to add to our store of provisions.

It was when the old man heard we had such a small stock of food that his face took on a graver expression than while he was telling of the overwhelming force likely to come against us, and until the sun was near to setting did we discuss the chances of replenishing our scanty larder, but without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion.

That night each of us had for supper a piece of corn bread as large, perhaps, as half your hand, and so dry that it was like unto hardened clay.

While I was absent Giles had divided the force into three parties, allowing each in turn to go off duty for two hours, that all might thus have opportunity for sleep. It seemed to me best that such routine should be continued.

Master Bartlett, as if having forgotten what he had advised in regard to attempting the rescue of Esther Hinchman, proposed that both Giles and I lie down to rest, leaving him in charge of the fort, and this we did, for slumber weighed so heavily upon our eyelids that it was with difficulty I could keep mine from closing even while I made the rounds of the stockade.

During three hours or more we slept as only tired lads can, and when I came out from the blockhouse it was near to ten o'clock; but Master Bartlett had nothing of importance to report.

The enemy remained quite as vigilant as before, shooting with poor aim whenever one of the lads incautiously showed himself above the stockade, and nothing had been seen to betoken any change of plan on their part; therefore it was that I did no more than make the rounds from one sentinel to another, without giving any attention to the surrounding forest.

An hour later Giles joined me, he having gained

just so much the more sleep, and Master Bartlett took his turn at lying down.

We two lads stood near the door of the block-house while I explained to Giles that the enemy had been wasting less ammunition than usual, as it seemed to me, when suddenly a rattle of musketry was heard from the eastern side, near the water, and our lads who were at that portion of the stockade failed to return it.

As a matter of course, Giles and I ran quickly toward what seemed to be the danger-point, and, clambering up on the narrow platform, I demanded of the lad nearest me why he had not discharged his musket.

"I have seen no target as yet," he replied. "The shots were fired from such a distance that even the flashes of the guns have been hidden by the foliage."

Looking to the priming of my musket, I strained my eyes in vain for some sign of the enemy, but yet the reports continued to ring out in rapid succession, and I wondered why I failed to hear the whistling of the bullets.

Two or three of those who were off duty came running up in the belief that they might be needed, and it was only natural that all the other sentinels should have turned in that direction from which it seemed probable an attack would be made.

Therefore it was, and I am willing to take all the blame for such carelessness, that the stockade nearabout the gate was virtually unguarded.

The first intimation I had that the discharge of musketry from the eastward was only a feint on the part of the enemy was from Master Bartlett, who, having come out of the blockhouse, saw at once in what way we had laid ourselves open to an attack.

It was the report of his musket which caused me to whirl about suddenly, and then it looked as if fifty or more naked savages were scaling the stockade just over the gates, while inside perhaps ten or twelve stood awaiting the coming of their comrades.

An exclamation of anger because of my stupidity involuntarily burst from my lips, as I gave the word for all, save only four sentinels, to join me; but, by the time the lads were down from the platforms, there were not less than two score Indians already inside.

It seemed to me at that moment as if the fort was already taken; but so great was my anger because of having given the foe the opportunity he wanted that I forgot all the danger which menaced, and, shouting to hearten my comrades, ran forward side by side with Giles March to do whatsoever we might toward repairing the mischief.

And now of what took place during the next half-hour I have no clear knowledge, save as to our first charge, when, emptying our muskets into that throng of half-naked murderers, we dashed forward, not stopping to reload, but depending upon using our weapons as clubs.

It was like some horrible nightmare, where one struggles against such odds that he can make no headway, but is continually forced to exert himself to the utmost, knowing death to be close at hand.

Once, while I was parrying with my musket a blow which one of the Mohawks would have dealt me, another ran swiftly around, as if to strike from behind, and already in fancy had I felt the burning sensation which accompanies the thrust of cold steel, when the report of Master Bartlett's musket rang out, while one of my adversaries dropped dead as the other took to his heels.

It was a battle wherein we fought hand to hand, overmatched in numbers, in strength, and in weapons, and yet to the credit of the Minute Boys it must be said that even those who had shown themselves faint-hearted shortly before, fought like men, regarding not their own lives in the hope of delaying the enemy ever so little on his march through the valley.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER THE BATTLE

If it were advisable to spend the time, one might write page after page, detailing the acts of heroism performed by the Minute Boys in this their first battle, when, taken by surprise, and with odds of not less than three to one against them, they saved the fort from capture.

Master Bartlett, who should be a judge in such matters, declares that never one of us flinched from his duty; but I could speak only of what occurred as I myself took part in it, and it seemed as if we were favored by God, else the enemy must literally have overrun us.

There were times during the battle when it was possible for us to reload our weapons; but before twenty minutes had passed, my gun was so foul that I could not drive a bullet home, and was forced to depend upon the weapon as a club, or use my knife.

And yet we drove those human wolves back from whence they came, all save eight, who remained inside the stockade with no breath of life in their ugly bodies.

I have always maintained that an Indian is a coward who can fight well only when his adversary has been taken by surprise, or is too feeble for resistance. So it was here. During half an hour, mayhap, they fought like the wolves that they are, and then, as one after another was cut down, the remainder of them turned tail, striving to make their way out, and we did our best to lessen the number of John Butler's followers.

One there was who showed himself courageous, despite the fact that he battled in a wicked cause, and, when we pressed him hard, stood with his back against the logs, fighting until he fell dead.

The others were as curs. Not until the last of the horde who could move had escaped did we count up our losses, and grievous they were as compared with our numbers. Ezra Simpson lay dead across the body of a stalwart Indian, with evidences enough near by to show that he had left his mark upon more than one of those who would turn our peaceful valley into a shambles.

Two of the company were seriously wounded, and three others, including myself, bore marks of either knife or hatchet, but not to such an extent that we were disabled.

It was a victory for us; but should we win two or three more in the same manner, then were we undone for a verity, because of being wiped out entirely.

It goes without saying that Master Bartlett did

valiant duty. Two others, besides myself, owed their lives to him, for it was as if he saw all that was going on, and wherever the battle raged hottest he sought to aid him who was hardest pressed. Without the old man, I fear there would have been a different ending to this poor tale.

There was no rest for us when the battle had come to an end. Those whose turn it was to sleep threw themselves down on the floor of the blockhouse, and the rest of us did duty on the walls, all save five, who were told off to drag out through the small gate, even at risk of being shot down, the dead bodies of our enemies.

That done, we buried Ezra Simpson hurriedly but reverentially, and perchance the tears which flowed from our eyes were caused by the knowledge that our time of greater suffering was yet to come, while they had done with the agony of death.

I think the fever of battle was yet upon Giles March, when we had finished the mournful task of laying our comrade in his last bed, for no sooner was that done than he said eagerly to me:

"Now is the time when we may make an effort to release Daniel Hinchman's sister, with more chance of success than ever before."

"What do you mean, Giles?" I cried, in surprise. "We have but just brought to an end as severe a battle as we shall ever again fight, however long we claim to be soldiers, and would you

run another hazardous venture on the heels of this?"

"Ay, that I would, Jonathan Ogden. The Indians have been beaten thoroughly, and for a certain time are cowed by failing to capture this stockade, which, doubtless, they believed would fall into their hands like a rotten apple. Now is come the time for us to strike."

"I believe the lad speaks truly," Master Bartlett said, as he joined us. "If I know anything of the red sneaks, they will not make another assault upon this fort to-night, but will spend the time mourning over the dead, and patching up the living who bear the marks of our weapons. More than that, it is not reasonable for them to suppose we would attempt so soon to strike a blow in return."

"It is my right to leave the stockade this time," Giles said, in a tone so firm that I realized it would be useless to argue against his proposal, whereupon I replied, turning to Master Bartlett:

"If it so be you think it right for three of this small party to venture into yet further danger, leaving us weak as we are, go, although it would please me better that Giles took the command of the fort while I journeyed toward Wintermoot's."

"Are you ready, Master Bartlett?" the lad asked, eagerly, and I fancied there was somewhat of grim pleasure in the old man's heart at the thought of such a venture, for he replied promptly:

"Ay, that I am, lad, and the sooner we set off, the sooner will we be trying to get back inside this fence of logs."

"Yes, if you live to return," I said, moodily, whereat the old man clapped me on the shoulder heartily, as he cried:

"Those who venture most are apt to live the longest, — at least, that has been my experience. I'm not claiming that we'll be able to release the girl; but 'twixt now and sunrise we shall know if it be possible."

Giles had already gone into the blockhouse to find Daniel Hinchman, and I was hardly yet recovered from the daze which had come over me with the idea of setting out on a venture directly on the heels of a battle, when the three were marching toward the small gate.

I ran after them to unbar it, wishing to have even that slight share in the task, after which they crept silently out.

"God be with you," I whispered.

"If He goes with either party this night, it will be with us," Master Bartlett said grimly, and then the three were lost to view in the gloom.

I was left with but eighteen lads to defend the fort, and it seemed, with the going of the old man, that our strength had departed. It was necessary I pull myself together with a will, else had my heart grown so heavy that those who called me the captain of the Minute Boys would have seen by one

look at my face that I was no longer capable of controlling even myself, let alone my comrades.

At such a time work, and plenty of it, does a fellow a deal of good. I went here and there, doing whatsoever my hands could find to do, in order to drive away the timorousness which was creeping into my heart.

As yet, those of us who were slightly wounded had given no attention to their hurts. Now I insisted that each lad be looked after carefully, saying to those who laughed at such coddling that it was necessary, because our numbers were so few that the loss of one would be serious indeed, and he who might be disabled because of neglecting his wounds was nearly as much to be blamed as the coward who ran away.

It goes without saying that all this while we kept strictest watch from the top of the stockade, but without seeing anything whatsoever of the enemy, however recklessly we exposed ourselves.

It was as Master Bartlett had said, they were cowed for the time being, because of failing in an attempt which they believed could be carried through without severe loss.

And now am I come to that part of my story which seems almost improbable even to myself.

The night passed, and the next day was nearly half spent before anything occurred to cause either joy or sorrow. We had seen nothing whatsoever of the Indians; it was as if the siege had suddenly

been raised, and I was such a simple as to question whether that might not be the fact.

Because we had beaten back such an overwhelming number of Mohawks, we lads were heartened wondrously, believing it possible to accomplish far more than we had ever supposed ourselves capable of, and were in fine fettle for whatsoever might come, when suddenly the watcher on the south side of the stockade cried out:

"Here comes Giles March, and with a supply of provisions."

I thought the lad had taken leave of his senses, and sprang up on the platform, fearing the Indians were playing some new trick, when, to my amazement, I saw Giles staggering toward the fort under the weight of a heavy buck.

Behind him came Master Bartlett with a bag of what I judged might be meal on his shoulder. Directly in his wake was the same girl I had seen in the Indian encampment, and, bringing up the rear, appeared Daniel Hinchman, burdened as were the others.

Had John Butler's army marched out of the forest arraying themselves in battle-line, I could not have been more astonished than I was to see returning so soon those whom I feared had gone to certain death.

It is not necessary I should say that we unbarred the gate without delay, and, when Giles came in, throwing down the buck with the air of one who

has borne his burden as long as possible, I cried out, even before greeting the others:

"How did you dare spend time in hunting when the woods are filled with savages?"

"In the first place I didn't spend any time hunting, and next, it seems as if all the Indians who were round about the stockade had beat a retreat to Wintermoot's."

Then Master Bartlett, dropping his load on the ground, said, with boyish glee:

"There is meal enough, lad, to fatten your larder for two or three days, at all events, and Daniel has got of dried deer flesh as much as will serve to keep your jaws working for a full fortnight."

The girl entered the stockade hurriedly, looking around with an air of most intense relief, as if she had at last arrived at some secure place of refuge, instead of having come where the chances were that death awaited her.

"There is little need to keep more than one sentinel on duty," Master Bartlett said, with a laugh, "for, from what we have seen, the brave band of Mohawks has decided to throw up the job with which John Butler entrusted them, and are spending their time in all kinds of heathenish mummery round about their lodges at Wintermoot's."

Hearing this, every fellow leaped from the platform and gathered around those whose mission had been so quickly but thoroughly performed, to hear their story.

"I will stand on guard while you tell us how it happened that you could not only do what seemed impossible; but have brought with you that of which we stood sorely in need," I cried, all that burden of fear and responsibility suddenly lifted from my shoulders, as I sprang upon the platform just over the small gate.

"I reckon Giles had best spin the yarn," Master Bartlett said, "while I attend to my rheumatics, for spending the night nearabout the river has not done my old joints any good."

Then the old man fell to rubbing his knees energetically, and I knew, despite the smile which he forced to his face, that he was suffering; but, when I taxed him with it, he denied that he was in any great pain, saying it was better to drive away the ache before it had fairly settled down, than wait until it gained firm lodgment.

The remainder of the company clamored for a recital of what had been done, so Giles could do no less than go into the details, while Daniel led his sister to the blockhouse as if, which undoubtedly was the case, she needed repose.

"It was all so easy that, but for our precautions, we might have got back by daylight," Giles began. "Believing the Indians were stationed as they had been before the attack, we wormed our way through the underbrush, thinking ourselves wondrously fortunate in not coming across any, and only when

we were within an hundred yards, perhaps, of Wintermoot's did we see the first show of an enemy."

"Meaning that when we gave them the dose they needed inside the stockade, all the others grew disheartened," Master Bartlett interrupted. "It is the way the sneaks have. If you once get the upper hand of them, they are whipped to a standstill."

"It was not until nearly morning that we came to a little hill this side the fort, where we could have a view of all that was going on," Giles continued; "but long before arriving there, we heard the howls and yells of the Mohawks, as they sang what we fancied was a dirge for those who had been left behind. By the light of the many fires which had been built, for they believed themselves secure from an attack because of being so near the fort, we could see not less than two hundred of the villains, with here and there a white man among them, and I have the idea that John Butler has got a reasonably big job on his hands to hold the red allies in place, simply because the Minute Boys of Wyoming Valley thrashed them out of their boots."

"There is no question but that the one fight would have sent them back home, save for the fact that others are on the way to join them," Master Bartlett added.

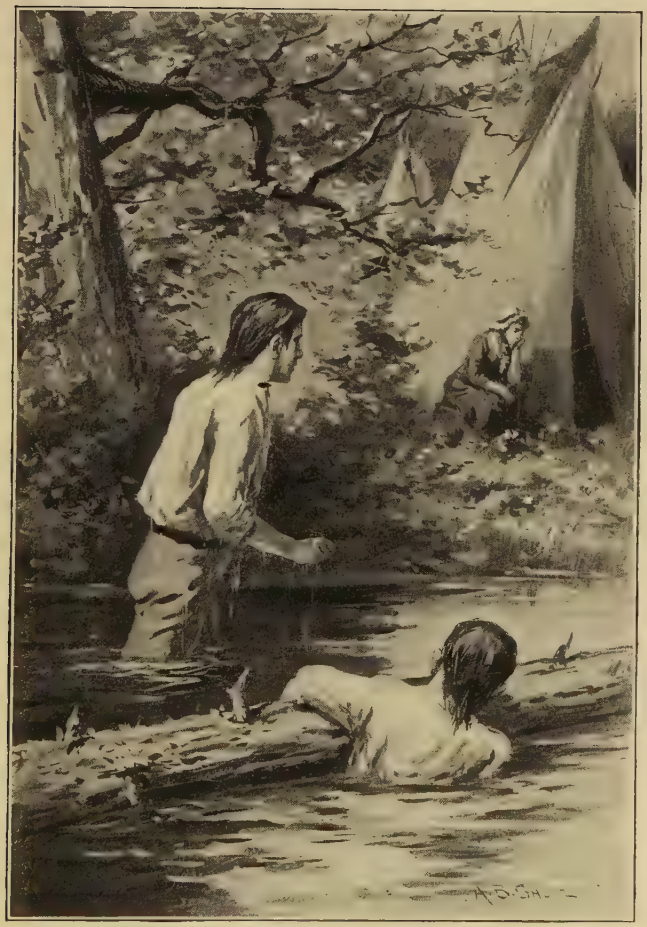
"The lodges appeared to be deserted, and we could see Esther Hinchman sitting outside that one

on the river-bank. Now you must know that all this hullabaloo was going on in front of the stockade, and perhaps two hundred yards from the nearest wigwam, therefore, taking Master Bartlett's advice, we made our way down to the stream, where a dead tree was floating in the eddy. Wading into the water, we pushed that off. The branches hid our heads from view, and the remainder of our bodies were beneath the surface. It was an easy matter to make it appear as if the tree grounded by accident directly in front of the lodge where Esther Hinchman was sitting, and then, watching his chance, Daniel went up to her. The only fear was that the girl might scream; but it so happened she did not, and in less than five minutes she also was in the water, clinging to the tree."

"But surely you could not get up-stream in the same way," I interrupted, and Giles replied, with a laugh:

"No, and neither did we try, for about the time Esther Hinchman joined us, the whole gang of Indians filed into the fort, where, most likely, they were to be feasted, in order to brace them up after the disaster of the night. Then was the time when I believed we should make our way into the thicket again, but Master Bartlett insisted that it would be little less than wicked to lose the chance of adding to our store of provisions, so he and I made a regular search of the lodges."

"You were taking too big a risk," I cried.



"'WATCHING HIS CHANCE, DANIEL WENT UP TO HER.'"

"Having gotten the girl, you should have been satisfied."

"In which case you wouldn't have so good a show of sleeping with a full stomach this night, lad," Master Bartlett said, grimly. "We could do our work without being seen, even though the Tories had had their sentinels on the stockade, which they didn't. Giles is right about the feasting part of it, for, as I came away, it was possible to see that rum was being distributed generously, and a savage always expects to gorge himself at such a time."

"We brought away all that we could carry," Giles continued. "I took as my share from the lodges a bag of meal; but when we were in the thicket once more and found this buck hanging up to season, I believed it was a good trade to swap corn-meal for deer. If any of you fellows think we ran our noses into danger, you are mistaken, for it was as safe as any pleasure excursion you ever heard about, although had we waited four and twenty hours before setting out, I question if Esther Hinchman would not have remained a prisoner with the Mohawks."

"And she may thank you for her release, Giles March," I said, determined that he should have his full share of the credit.

His cheeks reddened with pleasure, and he would have declared that he was not entitled to any praise if, at that moment, I had not startled the company

by saying in astonishment, as my eye caught a glimpse of something moving amid the foliage:

"There are white people coming this way, — women as well as children!"

Every fellow leaped to the platform, and then we saw that which at first filled us with wonderment, but was afterward easily explained.

Four men, two of whom were walking on crutches, six or eight women, all of whom carried burdens of some kind, and not less than a dozen children, the largest weighted down with what appeared to be provisions and household utensils, were coming toward us.

"Refugees from nearabout the burnt lands, if I'm not mistaken," Master Bartlett exclaimed, as he clambered up beside me.

"And why have they come here?" I asked, in bewilderment. "It would have been safer for them to have gone to Forty Fort."

"I'm afraid, lad, their coming means that John Butler's forces are advancing, and they have fled to the nearest fortified place."

There was little need for us to speculate very long as to why these people had come, for within five minutes they were all inside the fort, and we heard the pitiful story.

Stephen Morley, a settler who had taken up land in what was known as the burnt district, some six miles away, was the only able-bodied man among the party, and he it was who told the tale.

There were in that district, within a radius of perhaps five miles, six families. Four of the husbands were in the American army. Stephen Morley himself was a soldier, but had been given a three months' furlough because of illness, and arrived home just as a large body of Indians suddenly appeared in the neighborhood.

He, knowing much of the condition of affairs, and understanding that this must be the advance of Butler's force, realized the necessity of immediate flight, and, taking with them such goods and provisions as could be carried through the wilderness, the party set out the night before, travelling in the darkness, all unsuspicious of the fact that Fort Jenkins had been besieged.

Save for the fact of the attack upon us, they would have been made prisoners at the very moment when they believed themselves near a place of safety, and, except for the number of mouths to be fed, I could have rejoiced at their coming. As it was, however, I might not complain, because they were fleeing for their lives, and had brought with them, as we afterward learned, a sufficiency of provisions for three or four days' consumption.

It was a welcome addition to our number, for in those days, and in our valley, the women could and did fight as valiantly as the men. The only phase of the matter which troubled me was that we might be hemmed in so long that starvation would finally stare us in the face, and, with those

children crying for bread, one could not hold out as long as he otherwise might.

Master Morley could give us little information concerning the strength of the party which had driven him and his neighbors from their homes. It seems that the savages were yet several miles from the settlement when their whereabouts were discovered, and Morley had advised immediate flight, because of the rumors regarding Butler's intentions, not making an effort to learn any particulars concerning the enemy.

Among the other things which these guests of ours brought was a quantity of powder equal to all we had in the fort, and this, as may be imagined, was very welcome to us, for I had been looking forward with cowardly fear to that time when we would be reduced to the last round of ammunition.

As a matter of course the women and children were given quarters in the blockhouse. My company and the male refugees could gain all the repose which might be allowed us by the enemy on the ground outside, while the weather was so warm.

With Stephen Morley, who had served in the American army nearly a year, and Master Bartlett, we Minute Boys had good advisers, and I felt as if I might well shift the heaviest of the responsibility on to their shoulders.

As a matter of course, we took Master Morley into our confidence, and Master Bartlett, Giles, and I held a council of war, as it were, as soon as

matters were settled down inside the stockade. Then it was decided, in view of the success which had attended the visit to Wintermoot's, that we make some attempt to get game before night should come. It was believed there would be no danger in venturing out, at least until sunset, for it was not probable that those who had driven the settlers from the burnt district would arrive before dark, or, even if they did, their course would be far to the westward of the river.

Therefore it was that I called the lads together, asking if any of them were minded to go out in search of game, and found that it would be necessary to make a detail by name, since every member of the company was willing to take the chances in order to add to the store of food.

I selected two of the lads whom I knew to be good shots, and Giles March named two others. These four we sent out at once, with instructions for them to remain near the bank of the river, and not to venture above three miles from the stockade.

When they had gone we added the names of the newcomers to our company of Minute Boys, dividing the whole into three squads as before, and settled down to routine duty, with good reason to believe nothing menacing would occur, at least until another day had come.

Then it was that Giles and I threw ourselves on the ground in the shade of the blockhouse to sleep, and when we awakened night had fully come.

Rising to my feet, wonderfully refreshed by the few hours of dreamless repose, I asked, curiously, of the first lad I saw, whether the hunters had brought much game.

"They haven't come back yet," was the reply. "Master Morley and Simon Bartlett are yonder on the eastern angle, watching for them."

"Haven't come back!" I cried, in dismay. "It was understood that even though they were on the track of a deer, there should be no question of returning before sunset," and, filled with apprehension, I ran toward that portion of the enclosure where I saw the two men of whom the lad had spoken, peering intently into the thicket.

"What can have happened?" I asked, nervously, climbing up by the side of Master Bartlett, and he replied in a whisper:

"According to my belief, lad, they have met the advance of Butler's force, and been taken prisoners."

"But they were told to stay near the bank of the river!" I cried.

"True, and that was because you and I were so stiff in our own opinions as to believe the Tory crew would keep on the direct course from the burnt district to Wintermoot's, whereas the chances are the scoundrels counted on first having a look at Fort Jenkins."

"We must go at once in search of them," I cried, not stopping to realize that but a short time before,

when Daniel Hinchman pleaded for aid to find his sister, I refused to allow any one to depart on so hazardous a venture in the night.

"To what end, lad?" Master Bartlett asked, sorrowfully. "If matters are as Stephen Morley and I fear, then, even though you turn this entire force out, nothing could be done. To my mind, if four lads well armed were overcome, then was it done by such numbers as are too many for us."

"And are we to sit here idle?" I cried, almost beside myself with grief, since it seemed as if I was directly responsible for their safety because of having allowed them to go.

"There is nothing else you can do, Jonathan Ogden, in justice to those who call you their captain," Master Bartlett replied, and he had hardly more than ceased speaking before a bright light flashed up near the river, considerably beyond musket-shot from where we were standing, and at the same time we heard shrieks and yells as of rejoicing.

"It is as we feared," Master Morley said, turning suddenly upon me, and speaking for the first time since I had come. "The savages have captured the lads, and we know full well the meaning of that fire."

"The meaning of it?" I screamed, understanding what he meant, but at the same time refusing to admit it.

"Ay, lad," Master Bartlett replied, in a tearful

tone. "Now is the time when those whom we whipped inside the stockade will have their revenge, and, if I mistake not, the fiends count on doing their bloody work where we must witness it."

"Then you believe they have taken our lads, and are about to torture them?" I whispered.

The old man nodded his head, and then turned away as if unwilling to say more.

CHAPTER V.

THE SORTIE

THERE could be no question but that Master Bartlett had guessed rightly as to the purpose of the savages, for there was no other way by which we could account for the fire which had just been kindled.

They would not have camped so far from Wintermoot's in order to break a day's march, and even if they had halted for the purpose of resting, common prudence would have dictated that they do so secretly.

When I had reasoned all this out in my mind, and been forced to believe the worst, it was no longer possible for me to think of ourselves as Minute Boys, if by so acting we were forced to remain inside the fort. Only one idea found lodgment in my brain, which was that we must, at all hazards, do what we might toward aiding the unfortunate lads, who were thus come to the stake while in pursuance of duty.

To remain idle within the stockade, as Master Bartlett seemed willing to do, while they suffered such torture as those fiendish savages could invent, seemed to me more heartless than anything I had

ever heard, and, forgetting my duty to the company of which I was captain, I cried, passionately:

"It shall not be. We will not remain here with folded hands and allow those murderers to do their cruel work!"

"Ay, it would not be if it were in our power to give them aid," Master Bartlett said, grimly. "Stephen Morley had fair chance to judge of the strength of the red-skinned wolves, and from him we know that there must, at the very least, be more than an hundred gathered around yonder fire. To venture out now is but to play into their hands, leaving the fort so illy manned that its capture would be certain."

"We are stronger than before Stephen Morley's party came in," I said, half to myself, and Master Bartlett replied:

"True, we are, and yet the number here is all too small for the defence of the stockade."

"If four or five should go out, there would still remain as many as our people of Wilkesbarre believe to be here," I continued, thinking aloud rather than making a statement which demanded any answer, and the old man asked with more of impatience than I had yet seen him display:

"What wild plan have you in mind, Jonathan Ogden? Don't forget that you are the captain of this company, and as such it is your duty to keep them together."

"A poor captain have I made," I replied, hotly.

"It were better for all that the youngest of the party had been selected for the command. If I should go out, you can serve the lads more to their advantage than I could ever hope to do."

"There is no good reason why you make such talk as that, and I would refuse to listen, save that it is necessary I know upon what your mind is dwelling."

"That can be told quickly," I replied, burning with the desire to be where I could strike a blow at those who were making ready for such work as the imps of the evil one would blush at. "I am minded to go out there, not boldly, nor in a careless manner, but to creep upon that band of demons until it be possible either to drive them away, or do the last friendly act to our comrades who are prisoners — bring them to their death quickly."

"He who has had the most experience in warfare with the savages will tell you, Jonathan Ogden, that you haven't one chance in ten thousand, even though you take all your company of Minute Boys, to drive away those savages after they have once begun, or made ready for their cruel work. I grant you it would be a blessed boon to kill the lads quickly; but to do that you would bring down, not only upon yourselves, but on all within this stockade, that horde of ravening wolves."

I was not minded to continue the discussion when the moments were so precious, and knew beyond a peradventure that Simon Bartlett would never

give his consent to my going in case I asked it; therefore did I put the matter plainly before him:

"It is my intent, Master Bartlett, to do whatsoever I can to aid my comrades, and with the expectation of meeting death while doing it. Neither the fact that I am in command of this company, nor that it is a forlorn hope on which I am embarking, can prevent me. If so be two others here want to go with me, I believe it possible the dear lads may be killed before they are tortured."

"I am one who goes with you, Jonathan Ogden," came a voice near at hand, and, looking down from the platform on which the old man and I were standing, I saw Giles March, who had come up unobserved and thus heard a goodly portion of the conversation.

"But you must stay here, Giles," I cried, and he replied, sharply:

"What fetters have I more than you? Is the captain of a company the only one who is permitted to attempt a man's work?"

As a matter of course, that silenced me. What reply could I make to such questions?

"You know how few are the chances that we shall come back into this stockade alive?" I ventured to ask, and he replied promptly:

"Ay, even as well as you, Jonathan Ogden, and yet would I go, for death were better, as I look

at the matter, than remaining here idle, knowing what is being done yonder."

"What is it you speak of in which death seems so certain?" Daniel Hinchman asked, as he came up hurriedly, and I would have held my peace, but Giles March must needs explain to him what I proposed to do.

"And who will go with you, Jonathan Ogden?" Daniel asked.

"I am going," Giles said, before it was possible for me to make reply.

"Then you shall count me in also. It would be the least I could do, after this company of lads has saved my sister from a doom even worse than that which you say probably awaits those who went out hunting."

Again I would have protested; but Master Bartlett, laying his hand heavily on my shoulder, said gravely:

"Haven't they as good right as you to risk life in the hope of aiding a comrade? Now you have the two you asked for, and, if it still be in your mind to go out on what I shall count a hopeless task, then let me beg you do it secretly, allowing no person inside this enclosure, save only Stephen Morley and myself, to know that the force has been weakened by seven."

"How seven?" I asked, with irritation.

"The four hunters and you three, for there is no more chance one will return than the other."

Leaping down from the stockade, I began hurriedly to make my preparations, for however determined I was to sally forth, such talk as Master Bartlett was indulging in could have no other effect than that of making me for the moment faint-hearted, and surely just then I had need of all the courage which could be summoned.

I would take with me nothing save my musket and ammunition; every garment that could be dispensed with should be left behind, lest it impede me in the short journey which must be made as silently as death, and Giles and Daniel followed my example, until we stood in little more clothing than was indulged in by those fiends whom we hoped to kill.

While this was being done, Master Bartlett held a whispered conversation with Stephen Morley, after which the old man said:

"If you go out through the gate, lads, one or more of the company will know your purpose, therefore I propose that you let yourselves down from the top of the stockade at whatsoever point seems best to you, and, although we dare not hope you may return, both Stephen Morley and I will stand here on watch, ready to open the small gate when we see you coming, or to summon the rest of the company to shoot down those who may be pursuing."

"As well go from here as anywhere?" I said

to Giles, pointing just above our heads, and he nodded.

Master Bartlett gripped each of us by the hand in turn, and thus we climbed up, swinging ourselves over the top of the stockade and dropping down on the outside.

I had feared that one or both of the men might attempt to indulge in leave-taking, and so tensely were my nerves strung then that I could not have endured anything of the kind; but, fortunately for me, not a word was spoken.

After reaching the ground, it was not necessary we should hold any converse one with the other. Each of us understood what was to be done, and could see plainly before us the goal. The fire was leaping higher and higher, and a deathly sickness came into my heart, as I asked myself whether the tongues of flame had not already fastened upon the bodies of our comrades.

It was as if Giles March read my thoughts, for he said in a whisper:

"They haven't begun the work of torture yet, else would we have heard songs and shouts. Yonder light comes from the camp-fire, where doubtless they are making ready supper."

As nearly as I could judge, the Indians were less than a mile away, and the night was so far advanced that it seemed necessary we take some chances of making a noise, else we might arrive too late, therefore I believe we covered the distance

within half an hour, seeing nothing during that short journey betokening the presence of foes. It was as if the murdering villains, secure in their numbers, believed that no danger threatened them, or that it would not be necessary to send out scouts, because we in the fort were penned up like sheep awaiting the butcher.

When we had finally arrived so near the fire as to be able to distinguish objects within the circle of illumination, it was possible to see two of our lads bound to trees near by, and looking as one may well fancy human beings would look when watching preparations that are being made for the most cruel death which can come to man.

"Where are the others?" Daniel Hinchman asked in a whisper.

"Already dead," Giles March replied, confidently, "and theirs was the happier fate."

"Why can't they have escaped?" I asked, hopefully.

"Because, if such had been the case, we should have seen them at the stockade before this. Stephen Morley has said that the Indians were advancing like soldiers on a skirmish-line, covering not less than half a mile in distance, and in such case, all ignorant of the fact that so many foes were near, the lads would not have made détour wide enough to avoid them."

I hardly heard the last of his words. If, indeed, two of our lads were already dead, then were they

the more fortunate. We could do nothing in their behalf, and it was of the living that care should be taken.

So nearly as could be told, there were less, instead of more, than an hundred savages encamping here to indulge in their fiendish sport, and the thought came to me like a flash of light that there were none of the red demons at Wintermoot's who would miss seeing such a spectacle as that afforded by two white boys while they were being tortured to death. Therefore might we with good reason expect all that horde of bloodthirsty murderers would arrive before the final moment came.

I said to Giles that, if we were to effect anything, the task must be begun quickly, for, although it did not seem within the range of possibility we could overmaster four score or more, surely was all hope gone when that number should be doubled or trebled.

"Ay, I am of the same mind, Jonathan, therefore say what shall be done, and we will commence, selling our lives desperately, but making certain to hold the last shots for those poor lads yonder."

I had no more idea than he how we could strike the heaviest blow; but, in turning over the matter in my mind, came the desire to lessen the number of the enemy by as many as might be possible, and therefore did it seem to me as if that might best be done by beginning the work at long range.

Acting on my suggestion, rather than commands, Daniel stole softly to the right of me, a distance of perhaps an hundred paces, and Giles as far in the opposite direction, while I remained with my musket resting on the branch of a tree, that there might be no question as to the trueness of aim until one or the other should open fire.

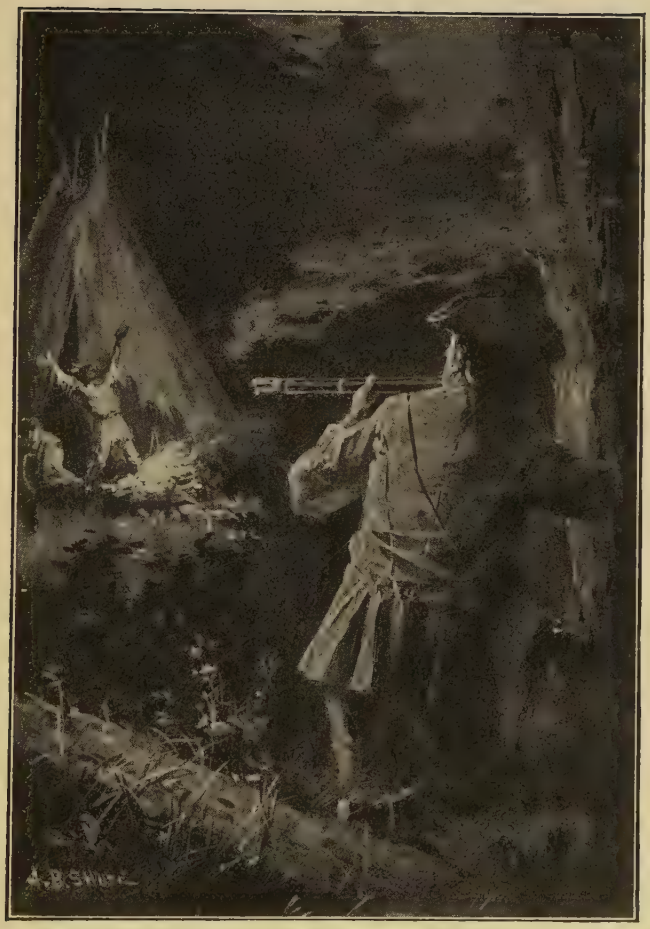
With the reports of three muskets coming from so many different points, each at quite a distance from the other, the savages would reasonably suppose they were surrounded by a considerable force, and therefore might be thrown in confusion sufficiently long for us to reload and get in a second volley before any move was made.

This would suffice for six of them, unless we were careless in the shooting, and after that had been done Daniel and Giles were to come back to me, when we would do whatsoever was dictated by the movements of the enemy.

It was Daniel who fired first, and I saw an Indian, who was standing somewhat apart from the others, as if he was one of the chiefs of the tribe, pitch forward on his face, dead.

Then came Giles's shot, and a brave who was bending over the fire, evidently cooking meat, fell among the embers, getting a taste before he died, I hope, of what he would have inflicted upon our comrades. On the instant I discharged my musket, and the third Mohawk fell, never to rise again.

The Indians stood for a moment as if transfixed



"THE THIRD MOHAWK FELL, NEVER TO RISE AGAIN."

with amazement and terror, looking here and there questioningly, and not a movement toward us had been made, when once more Daniel fired.

That savage who was standing full in the light of the flames fell at the report of his musket, and his neighbor dropped an instant later under my bullet, while on the other side of the fire a sixth man sank down.

Then, as never before, did I work with utmost haste to reload my weapon, hoping to get in one more shot before my comrades joined me, and in this was I successful.

The seventh Mohawk had been sent to his happy hunting-grounds when Giles and Daniel came up, and we three, peering intently toward those blood-thirsty cowards, who dared not make a move, as if fearing that some supernatural power had stricken their fellows down, loaded our weapons.

Then, in a twinkling, we dashed toward the encampment, without any purpose save that of coming hand to hand with those whom we believed were speedily to kill us.

When we had arrived just at the edge of the thicket, and in another instant would have come out into the light of the fire, the Indians made their first move, which was to retreat until they gained cover, for the brutes were never known to be willing to stand up in the open against an unseen enemy.

"One more shot," I whispered, hurriedly, and even as the last vanished, two of them fell to the

ground dead; but whether the third bullet missed its billet, we could not see.

Now, on the instant, came to me a possible plan. There was one chance perhaps in a thousand of its succeeding, and yet, if it didn't, we were in no worse position than before, for we had come fully expecting to yield up our lives in the hope of giving our comrades a merciful death.

"You two shall stand here within the shelter of the trees," I said, hurriedly, "and fire as rapidly as may be possible whenever you see a target. In the meanwhile I will make my way through the thicket until coming up behind the prisoners, when there is the barest possibility I may be able to sever their bonds."

Then, throwing down the musket and drawing my knife, I made my way outside the circle of light, hidden by the foliage, giving no heed as to preserving silence, and hearing, as I ran, the discharge of a weapon by one of my comrades.

My heart beat as if it were like to burst through the flesh, for there had suddenly come into my mind the belief that it was possible we should yet succeed, if not in holding our own lives, in giving liberty to those who had been so near death.

Hardly knowing if I walked or ran, giving no heed as to whether there might be any one in my path, I made all speed until, having gained the tree behind which John Coburn was bound, and slashing

through the deer-hide thongs with my knife, I whispered, hoarsely:

"If it be possible to use your legs now, lad, make all speed to the fort, where Master Bartlett is watching for your coming. In case your limbs are numbed, stand where you are until the blood circulates again, and then make a rush."

I question if thirty seconds had been spent in freeing John, and then, darting back into the bushes once more, I came up behind the other lad, — Oscar Stephenson, — just as another report from the rear told that an Indian had incautiously shown himself.

Oscar was free, and, as I made ready to go back where Giles and Daniel were waiting, I saw the lad straighten up, as if trying his muscles. An instant later the two were flying like startled deer; but their movements were the signal for the Indians to rush forward, and in a twinkling the whole savage horde was at my heels.

Crack! crack! rang out the muskets of my comrades, and, guided by that sound, I reached them as speedily as my legs could carry me, snatching the musket which Daniel held toward me, and starting hotfoot for the stockade.

Rapid as had been my movements, the rescued lads ran even more swiftly, for they had been looking death in the face an hour or more, and were able to accomplish that which at any other time would have been impossible.

Daniel was just behind me, not two paces distant, and close at his heels came Giles, who, when we had run half-way to the stockade, said, hoarsely:

"It were better we stopped here for one more shot than to cross the clearing while there are so many behind us."

It was good advice, and, wheeling about, I charged my musket with trembling hands, for what with the excitement and the exertion, I was quivering like an aspen leaf.

Then we waited for a target. Beyond the glowing fire as we were, it was difficult to distinguish the enemy. I was on the point of proposing that we move on rather than lose valuable time, when hardly ten paces distant I saw a black form amid the foliage, and then another and another, until we could count five sneaking up, probably seeing us even more plainly than we saw them.

Fortunately all of our weapons were loaded, and, prodding my comrades to call their attention to that which I saw, we took steady aim and fired.

A howl of pain followed the report, as one of the figures turned and went halting back toward the fire, while two dropped, and the others stood as if suddenly turned into statues.

"Verily have we dealt a blow to the Mohawks of which we should be proud, even though we never reach the stockade again," I said exultingly, and there was in my heart a fervent thanksgiving that

I had been allowed to slay so many of those who would make of our valley a shambles.

"It will be better if we get to the stockade alive," Giles said, grimly, and then we ran more slowly, because of trying to load our weapons as we moved.

I am making a long story of what should be told in few words, and, therefore, will cease trying to glorify myself and my comrades for our work of the night, to say that twice before coming out into the cleared space in front of the stockade we loaded and fired at skulking figures amid the trees, wasting no shot, and then was come that most dangerous portion of the work.

Full fifty yards, from the edge of the thicket to the small gate of the stockade, we must run exposed to the full view of those who might follow, and Giles said, as we slackened our pace before bursting out of the bushes:

"It were better we separated than ran in a bunch, for of a verity are we to be their targets now."

As he said, so we did. Each for himself, and, twelve or fifteen yards apart, we started on that race with death.

It seemed to me as if I had no more than left the cover of the bushes when the muskets began to sound, and, before half the distance was covered, it was as if no less than an hundred were shooting at me; but I came to understand afterward that this multiplicity of reports arose from the fact that

our friends within the stockade were keeping up quite as heavy a fusillade as were the Mohawks.

And now for that which seems almost beyond belief: We three lads covered the distance in the open, where we afforded the best targets to our pursuers, gaining the shelter of the fort without having been scratched by a bullet, and that when, I dare venture to say, no less than fifty missiles were sent after us by the excited foe whom we had outwitted so completely.

Once inside, with the gate barred behind us, I fell forward on my face, unable to move or speak, so thoroughly exhausted was I by the excitement and the exertion, and for a time I knew nothing whatsoever, until becoming dimly conscious that Master Bartlett was bending over me, saying:

"You have accomplished that this night, Jonathan Ogden, which I doubt if any man in the valley could have done, and, if our people at Wilkesbarre do not come to know of the courage and self-sacrifice you have shown in behalf of your comrades, it will be because I can no longer wag my tongue."

"The others, where are they?" I managed to ask, and with speech came power of motion, until I stood upright.

"All are safe, lad, that is — you three who went out, and two who came back ahead of you."

"Do you mean Oscar Stephenson and John Coburn?"

"Ay, lad."

"And what of the other two? Were they killed?"

"Oscar claims that they must be at liberty, for, when the savages first appeared, the others made for the river, evidently counting on swimming across, and therefore, while there are two Minute Boys of the Wyoming Valley who will not answer to the roll just now, it is probable they are yet alive. I would not have believed, when you left, that twenty men could have rescued those lads who were so near the stake, and am burning to know how it was done."

"There is nothing to be told, Master Bartlett," I said, with a nervous laugh. "We simply advanced and fired upon the Indians while under cover; they were stampeded because of not being able to see us, and, consequently, as much was done by our remaining hidden as by our shooting. It did indeed seem like a dangerous task when we began, but, as matters turned, it was no more than you or many another man has done time and time again since the troubles concerning the ownership of this valley began."

"As to that I have another opinion, lad; but we won't discuss it now, for, unless I am mistaken in those red villains, there is a hot night ahead of us. I am of the mind that we will have another attack upon the stockade before morning, and it promises to be vastly different from the last one, for now the savages will fight to revenge the death

of those whom you have killed. Therefore, as soon as may be, lad, I beg you to get your company in shape, and see to it that you call upon the women as you do the men."

In a flash I understood that what Master Bartlett said was true; even at that moment I knew the fort must be surrounded by those who thirsted for vengeance, and, in addition to obeying the command of John Butler, they would strive to kill us because of what we had done that night. Nor would it be as easy to drive them away as before, and we were facing a greater danger than Giles, Daniel, and I faced when we went toward the campfire.

It can well be understood that I lost no time in doing whatsoever I might toward making ready for the battle which was to come, and my comrades who had shared with me the danger just past were not one whit behind in their efforts.

We put on sentinel duty every member of our company, including myself, leaving to Master Bartlett and Stephen Morley the task of making the rounds to ascertain if each fellow was doing his duty, and the women stationed themselves here and there under the walls, where they could load our weapons as soon as they were discharged, while the children we fastened securely inside the blockhouse, lest in their terror they come out and impede the defenders in their work.

Then we waited for that which we knew was

surely to come, and I had more of timorousness in my heart during the few moments of quietude which reigned than when we were making the attack upon that horde who were preparing to torture our comrades.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECOND ATTACK

WHY it was that my thoughts should go back to Elias Shendle at this moment when we were in the greatest peril, I am unable to say. Even as we waited for the first report of a musket, betokening that the savages were bent on taking revenge, the question as to where the lad might be came to me, and straightway I, who had felt that he of all our company was the most secure, began to be anxious concerning him.

If the lad had gone to Forty Fort without hindrance, unfolded his budget of information there, and returned immediately, he would barely have time to arrive at Fort Jenkins, and it was reasonable to suppose he would spend at least four and twenty hours among his friends, not thinking it might be absolutely necessary for him to hasten back.

Then, arriving on the morrow, mayhap he would find the stockade so invested as to render it impossible for him to enter, and thus be forced to return again; at least, so I figured it in my mind, until coming to believe that I might have seen the last of my comrade in this world.

Regarding the fate of the hunters who as yet were unaccounted for, I had no great fear, because of the fact that their comrades reported them as having fled toward the river, and, once on the other side of the stream, I believed they would seek safety at the Pittstown stockades, which, as I have already said, were directly opposite Fort Jenkins.

"There is little use in trying to form plans for defence when we have no fair idea as to how the attack may be begun," Master Bartlett said, seeing that I was in a brown study.

"It was of Elias Shendle I was thinking, sir, and for the moment had forgotten we were here to defend the stockade against overwhelming odds."

"Elias may thank his lucky stars you believed it necessary to send word to Forty Fort as to what had been learned," Master Bartlett replied, gravely. "With such a force of savages as we know are hereabouts, or at Wintermoot's, there will be no child's play when the business is once begun, for, if we tire one gang, as you did those who made the first attack, there are others in plenty to take their places."

"That has the sound of croaking, Master Bartlett," I said, with a mirthless laugh, "and it seems to me just now what we most need is something to raise our courage."

"After what you three lads have done this night, Jonathan Ogden, I'm thinking that you are not in sore need of being bolstered up lest you show the

white feather, and, because you have proven yourself a lad of spirit, would I have you look upon the situation exactly as it is."

"And what may it be, Master Bartlett, from your standpoint?"

"Defeat for us, as a matter of course; but, please God, we'll hold out long enough for our friends and neighbors to know of what is being done, and thereby understand the better their own situation."

I was surprised that the old man should speak so positively of our being whipped, although such must be the natural conclusion by one who knew the strength of both parties, and I said as much to him, whereupon he replied, gravely:

"To my mind, lad, a man can fight better having confessed his own weakness, for he who anticipates the worst is not so easily discouraged as the one who, believing he will be victorious, suddenly finds the tide of battle turning against him."

It had been agreed that all within the stockade, save the women, should take their places on the platform as watchers, while Masters Bartlett and Morley kept an eye out to make certain no one was shirking his duty, and at this point in the gloomy conversation I bethought myself it was time to take station, therefore climbed up just over the small gate, with Daniel Hinchman a dozen paces to my left, and Giles March about the same distance on my right.

I saw Master Bartlett walking across the enclosure, as if to begin his rounds, while Stephen Morley was on the eastern side talking with some of those on duty there.

"Have you and Master Bartlett settled what is to be done?" Giles March asked, in a low tone, as he stepped nearer to me, both of us crouching where we could gaze out through the apertures between the logs, rather than expose ourselves uselessly as targets.

Knowing that there was little danger of disheartening a lad like Giles by giving words to gloomy forebodings, I repeated to him that which the old man had said, and, greatly to my surprise, he replied:

"I believe he is in the right of it, Jonathan Ogden. It isn't reasonable to suppose we could stand off very long such a force as John Butler has brought into the valley, even though we had ammunition in plenty, which is far from being the case. Sooner or later, unless help comes to us from the army, we must be whipped."

"Why?" I asked, hotly.

"Because John Butler has brought here an army to take possession of the valley, and has with him white men enough to keep the savages at their work, however little stomach they may have for it. Therefore do I say again that, before this business is ended, I am looking to see the settlements in Wyoming wiped out. But they shall pay a goodly

price for victory, Jonathan, even in the capture of this —"

He ceased speaking suddenly to raise his head above the tops of the logs, with his musket ready for instant use, and, following his example, I saw far away, even amid the gloom, a certain movement of the foliage which told that some heavy body was trying to force a passage through the bushes.

"If that fellow will keep on a minute longer, so that I may get a fair idea of where his carcass is, I'll guarantee he comes no nearer," Giles said, grimly, and then it was that there came into my mind once more the thought of Elias Shendle.

Laying my hand on his shoulder to prevent him from firing, I whispered:

"Make certain, Giles, who you shoot at, for it isn't impossible that Elias may have returned."

"Even if such was the case, he couldn't have made his way up past Wintermoot's while there are so many of the enemy hereabout," the lad replied, but at the same time he lowered his weapon.

"You might have said an hour ago that we couldn't have released the two lads who were being made ready for the torture, and yet we did it, Giles," but, even while speaking, I said to myself that it wasn't within the range of probability that he who was causing the movement among the branches could be our absent comrade.

Then it was that Daniel Hinchman caught sight of the disturbance amid the foliage, and, seeing him

raise his musket, I crept over to give warning; but before many minutes had passed, we knew beyond a peradventure that it must be a friend instead of an enemy who was thus coming up. No single Indian could have effected anything to his advantage by creeping so close to the stockade that it would have been impossible to shoot us down save by thrusting the muzzle of his musket between the logs.

"Keep your wits about you," I whispered to Daniel and Giles, "watching lest the savages make a dash, and I'll open the gate for whoever has been so fortunate, or so skilful, as to come alive through the forest wherein are lurking so many of the enemy."

Master Bartlett came up while I was unbarring the gate, and, when I told him of what we had seen, he stood by in readiness to defend the entrance if by any chance we had been mistaken.

Then, five minutes later, came a scratching upon the logs outside, and cautiously I swung the narrow gate open sufficiently wide to admit of one person entering at a time, when in crawled Elias Shendle.

Not until the gate was barred again securely did I turn to greet the lad who had joined us at such great risk of his life, and, instead of welcoming him, I said that which first came to my mind:

"Why did you come back, once having gained the security of Forty Fort?"

"Because this is my place, Jonathan Ogden,"

was the quiet reply, "and from what I have seen since noon, it strikes me that you need every musket here which can be mustered."

"What have you seen, lad?" Master Bartlett asked, anxiously.

"Savages and Tories enough to make a full army, and all of them with their faces turned this way. It was near to noon when I came up within half a mile of Wintermoot's, and since then have I made the best speed possible under the circumstances. Twenty times was I like to have run into a white cur or a red villain, and twenty times did I get off by the skin of my teeth."

"You succeeded in reaching Forty Fort?" I interrupted, not minded to hear more of information which was disheartening.

"Ay, and found there that I might as well have stayed here, for it's a question if they are not better informed as to the situation than are we. Two days before I arrived there, Colonel Zebulon Butler came from the army on a five days' furlough, and, learning of the danger which menaces, declares that he will allow the word 'deserter' written against his name rather than leave this valley while the enemy are so strong against us. The people have made him their commander, and it is agreed that Forty Fort shall be the general rendezvous. Before I got there, nearly all the women and children from roundabout had come up for safety. Runners have been sent to General Washington's camp, which is

now near New Brunswick, begging that troops be sent at least sufficiently long for us to make an attack upon John Butler's force; Colonel Zebulon Butler himself writing to the general that it is impossible for our people to retreat to a place of safety, and unless succor be sent at once we must all perish."

Elias ceased speaking as if his story was told, and Master Bartlett said, in a tone of satisfaction:

"It is well that they are alive to the danger which menaces. Does Colonel Zebulon believe Forty Fort will be attacked?"

"Indeed he does," Elias replied, "and with good reason. Yesterday did John Butler send a demand for surrender, not only of the fort, but of the entire valley, threatening that unless we throw ourselves on his mercy the savages shall be let loose upon us. It was when his messengers returned to Wintermoot's that I followed not above three hundred paces in their rear, believing safety lay in keeping as near to them as might be possible with secrecy, and thus did I come up as far as that nest of Tories without fear."

Even though Elias's journey had proved unnecessary, so far as warning our friends in the valley was concerned, it seemed to me of great benefit, since we had gained information of the general situation, and knew it was not necessary we absolutely sacrifice our lives in order to give them tidings of

what might be expected. Yet with such assurance it must not be supposed that the thought of surrendering the fort came into my mind, save as a last dread resort.

"How many men, think you, are in the Pittstown stockades?" Master Bartlett inquired, of no one in particular.

"Surely not more than a corporal's guard," I replied. "Why did you ask?"

"There was in my mind the thought as to whether we might not persuade them to come over to us," the old man replied, slowly, as if to weigh his own words, and Giles March said, sharply:

"If, as we believe, the two lads who are yet missing succeeded in reaching those stockades, then do the men of Pittstown know by this time all our needs, and would make effort to reinforce us if they were minded to do so."

Master Bartlett did not continue the conversation after this interruption; but a few moments later I noticed that he was holding earnest converse with Stephen Morley, and believed it had reference to sending some one across the river with an appeal for help.

It is not well that I should set down what we said and did during this time while waiting for the attack to be made, because it would not make pleasing reading. With the knowledge in the minds of all that we were heavily overmatched, there was little of cheer in our words; but no

thought in our hearts of yielding simply because the odds were heavy against us.

Every lad did his duty as sentinel, but never a sign of the foe was seen or heard until perhaps half an hour before midnight, and then the battle was begun upon that side of the stockade nearest the river, the savages suddenly bursting out from the thicket with whoops and yells, at the same time that a discharge of musketry came from every quarter.

This was no more than we anticipated. In fact, it was the kind of an assault we had reason to believe would be made, and were holding ourselves in readiness for it.

Four of the lads had been instructed by Master Bartlett that, when such assault began, they were to take stations on the side of the stockade opposite where the attack was being made, in order to give an alarm in case the enemy attempted to rush us from any other quarter at the same time.

This first assault would not have been anything very serious, as I viewed it, except for the fact that John Coburn, he who had been rescued from the stake, was quite painfully, though not dangerously, wounded, therefore was our force reduced by one, since he would be unable to do duty again for several days.

The savages had come on with a rush, firing at random, each bringing with him a log of wood to pile up at the foot of the stockade, with the idea

that they might scale the walls; but we poured in such a heavy dose of lead that within fifteen minutes they had had all that was needed, and to spare.

When they sneaked back under cover again, it was as if the battle had come to an end; but Master Bartlett said, grimly, to some of those lads who were congratulating themselves that we had won a victory:

"Don't deceive yourselves, lads; they were but just feeling of us, and the next time they try it, which will be before daylight, unless I am mistaken, their work won't be so difficult, for you will take notice that the logs they brought are yet piled up at the foot of the stockade. Now they may come with no burden, and it will be strange if some don't succeed in getting over."

"If they do, we'll make short work of them," Oscar Stephenson said, boldly, and Master Bartlett turned away, as if to say that it was a waste of time to argue the question with a lad who could not look further into the future.

In case only a certain few succeeded in scaling the stockade we might overcome them, but at some expense to ourselves, and in time, if the red demons could be kept at their work, we would have beaten ourselves, so to speak.

However, Master Bartlett was so convinced that there remained a breathing spell for us that he suggested to me the idea of allowing at least half

the force to lie down and sleep, if that should be possible, and so I directed, but as for myself and Giles March, there was no desire for slumber — death seemed too near at hand.

We were left unmolested perhaps an hour, and then the silence was broken as the sentinels on the eastern side discharged their muskets, when Elias Shendle, who was standing by my side, exclaimed, as we started forward:

"They count on hammering at the same place until the stockade can be scaled."

Within ten minutes I had good reason for believing that Elias had spoken no more than the truth.

Fully an hundred Indians suddenly burst out from the thicket, each carrying over his shoulder a log, and running at full speed, regardless of the fire which we poured in upon them. Throwing their burdens upon those which had previously been brought, they immediately retreated, strange to say, with a loss of only two of their number. Why our lads did not fire with greater accuracy of aim I fail even now to understand, and was not then minded to speculate upon it, because I saw plainly the plan which the enemy had in view for the capture of the fort.

On that side nearest the river was a pile of logs extending nearly to the top of the stockade, and Master Bartlett said, as I leaned cautiously over to see what had been done:

"They have made their preparations, lad, and I

am of the mind that at the next assault we shall find ourselves overrun."

He had said only that which I already realized; but it irritated me that the fact should thus be put in words, and I said sharply, not with any intent to show disrespect to one of his age, but owing to my nervousness:

"Of what avail is it that we continually speculate upon the time when the end shall come? If they succeed in gaining an entrance, it only remains for us to fight so long as we can hold our muskets."

"True, lad," the old man said, thoughtfully; "but it strikes me that we have a duty to perform before that moment shall come."

"And what may it be?" I asked, in surprise.

"If we fight until the last, refusing to surrender because of such mercy as those demons will show, *our* end has come with but little pain; but how about those women and the children fastened in yonder blockhouse?"

It was as if my heart ceased beating, for until that moment I had thought only of meeting death as a lad who was defending his home should meet it; but now I understood all too well that there was something more, — something of horror in which I would have no part, because of selfishly allowing myself to be put out of the world.

"But how can we provide for their safety?" I cried, passionately. "If we fight to the last, more cannot be demanded of us."

"Stephen Morley and I have been talking together as to the possibility of giving those poor creatures one little chance of escape, while we make our last stand, so that our lives may not be given up simply to save ourselves from the pain of torture."

"Explain yourself, Master Bartlett. We may not have many moments in which to talk, and if there is work to be done, it is necessary that we set about it quickly."

"Even now Stephen Morley is explaining to the women what we hope even against hope that it may be possible for them to do. So far as we know, the Pittstown stockades are in no immediate danger; why can't these women and children, during the heat of the battle, contrive to get themselves across the river, or, failing in stemming the current, drift so far down-stream as to be beyond reach of the fiends?"

"If they can leave the fort, then why not we?" I asked, and he replied in a tone which made me ashamed of having used the words:

"Because it is not for us to turn our backs upon the foe until the moment has come when we know, beyond a peradventure, that nothing can be gained by continuing the battle."

In order that no more words may be used than is absolutely necessary for the telling of the story, let me say that Masters Bartlett and Morley had

hatched up what seemed like a poor plan, but yet better than nothing.

Their idea was that, when the savages made the next assault, if they succeeded in throwing into the enclosure an overwhelming number, we should make our last stand near by the blockhouse, or inside, as the case might be. Before this could happen, the women, each taking from the building itself such timbers as could be readily carried, should be allowed to go out through the small gate, with the chance of gaining the river, and there, trusting to the logs or splints which they carried, gain the opposite side, or, as Master Bartlett had said, float down to some place of safety.

It was a poor plan at the best, but yet the only one that could be formed. As a matter of course, I agreed to it; but my agreement was no more than a form, for, on approaching the blockhouse, I saw that already were the women at work tearing out the inside in such fashion that each procured a plank or log which would serve to keep herself and little ones above the surface of the water.

I had no hope that it would succeed. With all these preparations for the final moment, and the knowledge that when the Indians had made up their minds to come in there was nothing to prevent them, death seemed so very near that it shut out every thought of life beyond the next assault.

And that came even before we had anticipated.

Giles had proposed that we divide the ammunition equally, and this was being done when the sentinels on the eastern wall gave the alarm. It seemed to me as if the words had no more than been spoken when, looking in that direction, I saw, coming over the stockade like a black cloud, hundreds upon hundreds of the naked foe, whooping and yelling, as they struck here and there at our fellows with their hatchets.

Three of the Minute Boys fell at the first rush, even before I had time to summon the others to the blockhouse.

Amid the howls and exulting cries of the savages, I heard Stephen Morley ordering the women to put into execution the plan which had been agreed upon, and as we lads and men ran into or behind the blockhouse, I knew, without seeing, that the helpless members of our little company were streaming out through the narrow gate, but believed that, once on the plain, they would be met by those whose chief delight is to butcher the helpless.

Then came that which you may call a battle, if such a name can be given to an encounter where less than twenty were opposed to three or four hundred.

We stood our ground, firing as rapidly as it was possible to recharge our weapons, and kept up such a shower of lead that, strange as it may seem, the savages wavered and hung back, when, by coming

forward at full speed, they could have trampled us under foot. There we held them in check, — how long I know not; but it seemed to me that half the night was gone before the foremost of the curs gathered courage enough to make the dash.

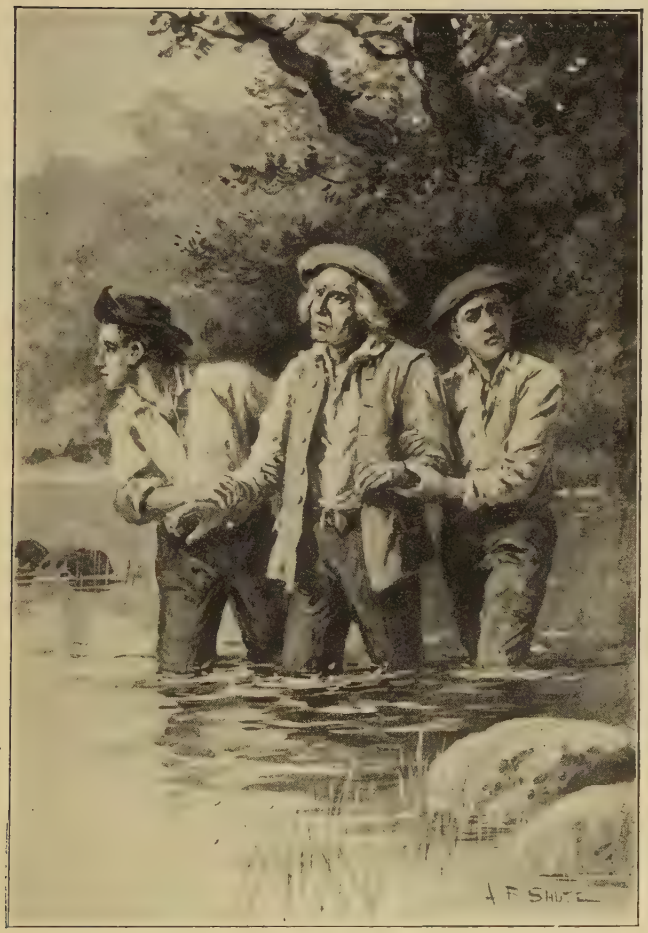
At that instant I felt a grip upon my shoulder, and Master Bartlett was shouting in my ear:

"We have done all that men can, and more than many would. Now let us take such chance for our lives as remains."

It seems pitiful a lad should be forced to set down the fact that, after having brought himself to the point where he believed it his duty to stand up fighting until death overtook him, he should beat a retreat, and yet that was what we did.

Now, looking back, when it is possible to view the matter calmly, my wonder is that we had not done the same thing before the second assault, knowing as we did what the end must be. At that time it would have been more than an even chance we might succeed in the escape by marching in a solid body to the river, where, plunging into the stream, we could take our chances of swimming to the opposite shore or of drifting down. Then there would have been a possibility of retreating without such loss as we afterward suffered, and without benefiting those whom we were bound to protect.

Of all that dreadful story of Wyoming, the only bright spot in it, if there can be anything bright



"GILES MARCH AND I EACH TOOK HIM BY THE HAND."

amid so much of horror, was that out of Fort Jenkins went all those women and children in safety, while our little force of twenty-three or four got away with a loss of seven, three of whom were killed at the first rush, one stricken down by a hatchet hurled at him as we stood near the block-house, and three captured when we began the retreat.

From the small gate to the river-bank was not above eighty paces, and, knowing that Master Bartlett could not run as swiftly as either of us, because of his infirmities, Giles March and I each took him by the hand, literally dragging the old man along with us, and into the river we three went.

Elias Shendle I had not seen since the fight began; but it seemed to me probable that he was among those who had first been killed.

I believe it was fully three minutes after we, who were the hindermost of that retreating company, leaped into the water before our pursuers opened fire, and then the chances of their doing any execution were exceeding small, for we had but to keep within the shadows of the western bank to be entirely hidden from view.

"Better leave me, lads, for I can't swim," Master Bartlett said when Giles and I had forced him into the stream, and were striking out lustily that we might get into the line of shadow where we would be hidden, and I, burning to do something which

would lessen the shame of having retreated when I should have remained to be killed, said, sharply:

"It shall be all three of us, Master Bartlett, or none. Do you take hold of Giles's collar and mine, and it will go hard if we can't succeed in carrying you along with us."

"It is best to leave me, lads; I am grown too old to be of much service, and a matter of a few days more or less will make no difference either to me or the people of the valley."

"You go with us, Master Bartlett, whether you will or no," Giles said, sharply, and then we held our peace, fearing to speak again lest we give the savage foe good warning of where a target might be found.

And the waters of the Susquehanna carried us swiftly and silently away, as they carried that night the women and children who were battling for life, down past Wintermoot's, past this bend and that cove, until the shrieks and yells of triumph raised by John Butler's wolves, as they exulted in their victory, were lost to our ears in the distance.

CHAPTER VII.

MONOCASY ISLAND

FATE carried us to Monocasy Island, which is, as all know, about a mile below Wintermoot's. The first intimation we had of having arrived at this place, which could hardly be called a refuge of safety, was when our feet struck the bottom, and then, because of the excitement and labor of the fight, and the exertion of swimming with such a burden as Master Bartlett made, we were so nearly exhausted that, after crawling up out of the water, neither Giles nor I could do other than lay flat upon the sands, panting as if from a long race, which indeed we had had.

Even then we were uncertain as to our whereabouts, and questioned if, unwittingly, we had not gained the opposite bank of the river. It was enough for the time being, however, that we had escaped from the merciless savages; but, when a prayer of thanksgiving welled up in our hearts, it was hushed because of the sorrow which followed with the possibility that we might be the only ones who had escaped from Fort Jenkins.

Master Bartlett was in no better bodily condition than either of us, and until the first gray light of

morning appeared in the eastern sky, we lay there upon the bank of the island, with the waters of the river just touching our feet, silent and well-nigh heart-broken.

"It is time we were getting under cover, lads," Master Bartlett said, when it became possible to distinguish surrounding objects. "If we alone of all our company have come out from Fort Jenkins, then is it our duty to take good care of our lives, for they will be needed before John Butler has finished his bloody work in the valley."

"We shall live to say that we ran away!" Giles March cried, bitterly, and Master Bartlett turned upon him angrily.

"It is only a boy who would reproach himself with what has been done. Of what avail if we had remained until death came? Who could have been benefited thereby? Think you that those at Forty Fort are not in need of such as us? Everything within our power was done last night, before we turned our backs upon the enemy, and now must we put forth every effort that we may be able to join them."

Well, Master Bartlett continued in that strain until he stung Giles and me into activity, — until he had literally made us ashamed because we reproached ourselves with flight.

Then it was, and before the day had really come, that we learned where we were, after which arose the question of what should be done.

Save for the knives in our belts, we were weaponless; of food we had not so much as would feed a sparrow, nor were we likely to find any on Monocasy Island.

"If the people at Forty Fort are depending on us for help, then do they lean upon a broken reed," Giles March said, bitterly, when we were hidden among the bushes where those who passed up or down the river might not see us.

"Just now, I admit, we are not in very fine trim for fighting," Master Bartlett said, cheerily, "but that isn't saying we sha'n't get into shape once more. It is a matter of staying here and sucking our thumbs till night shall come again, and then, if you lads cannot drag me through the water as before, we'll put together a raft and drift down until we have arrived opposite Forty Fort, where I venture to say we shall be welcomed as those who did their duty, even when they turned their backs upon the enemy."

Well, much as he said, so we did. Looking far up the river, we could see in the distance bands of savages on the western bank prowling around as if searching for those who had escaped their clutches, and but few of them were sufficient to keep us well within the shelter of the foliage, for however much a fellow may prate about standing in front of the foe until death comes, he does not in cold blood court that death very ardently.

We did not even dare to come out from our place

of concealment to get water, and by noon it seemed as if my throat was parched, the thirst being all the greater because everywhere around were the means of quenching it, but just beyond our reach.

We were hungry; but that was of small moment as compared with the craving for something to drink, and, with the view of taking our minds from the suffering, Master Bartlett told stories of what he had done during his younger days, when the valley was nearly the same as a wilderness, or described how the first settlers fought in turn the many claimants for the lands.

So the time passed, wearily, slowly, but none the less surely, until the sun, which had seemed at times to stand still in the heavens, sank toward the west, bringing evening near at hand.

Then, for the first time, did we question as to how we would make our way down-stream. Master Bartlett was in favor of building a raft of such saplings as could be cut with our knives, binding them together with vines, but both Giles and I insisted that, having rested during twelve or fifteen hours, we were well able to swim with him between us, and finally persuaded the old man to agree to such method of travelling.

Night was not yet fully come when we three crept down to the edge of the river, and, plunging our heads beneath the surface, revelled in the supply of water, enjoying the sweetest draughts I have ever known.

With thirst quenched, it was as if my courage returned, and I felt confident that, however many of John Butler's force might be between us and Forty Fort, we could succeed in entering that place of refuge, although how long it might remain such was an open question.

"We shall simply be continuing the fight which was begun at Fort Jenkins," Master Bartlett said, as we stood on the shore waiting for the darkness to cover us more completely, "and I am counting on finding the remainder of your company there, Jonathan Ogden."

God forgive me! it was the first time I had dwelt seriously upon the fate of our comrades. My own sufferings had occupied my mind to the exclusion of everything else, save when I listened listlessly to the stories of adventure which the old man told; but now I questioned, as a fever of fear crept over me, whether we three might not be the only survivors of the fight at that stockade, which we had hoped to hold until the valley could be saved from the horde which were bent on overrunning it.

"Don't conjure up that which will disturb you," Master Bartlett said, when I gave words to the thoughts which were in my mind. "It is enough if we make our way to the fort, and then will come the time when we can settle all doubts."

Well, an hour after sunset perhaps, we waded down into the water, Giles March and I, with Master Bartlett between us, and struck out strong in the

belief that the way was open before us. In fact, so secure did we feel that, while swimming leisurely, we talked among ourselves, regardless of the fact, which all three knew full well, that water is a rare conductor of sound, and thus like simples did we run our necks into danger when, by holding our peace we might, perchance, have accomplished what was so ardently desired.

It was hardly more than ten minutes after leaving Monocasy Island when, almost directly in front of us, there shot out from the western bank a boat in which were five men, and, at the same instant we saw it, the river in its vicinity was illumined by the flashes of guns, while the bullets actually splashed the water in our faces, so near to us did the missiles strike the surface.

Like a couple of loons, Giles March and I dove, carrying Master Bartlett down with us, swimming under water so long as we could hold our breath, and coming to the surface perhaps twenty yards down-stream.

Again the reports of muskets; again the zip-zip-zipping of bullets near by, and again we escaped unharmed, to dive once more.

Even as I went beneath the surface did I call myself doubly a fool for not having suspected that those bloodthirsty wolves, knowing some of us had escaped by the river, would have gone down-stream to lay in wait for our coming, on the chance that we failed to gain the shore beyond them.

Once more on the surface; but this time we were so far within the shadow of the eastern bank as not to be seen, yet it was possible to hear the splash of paddles, which told that the enemy were searching for us.

Now, when it was too late, I understood the danger of speaking aloud to my comrades, but motioned for Giles to swim across toward the nearest shore, for it was not within the bounds of reason that we could hope to pass the boat while remaining in the river.

Ten minutes later, for we were forced to move slowly, lest our whereabouts be made known, we climbed out on the bank once more, with no idea of where we might be, save that it seemed probable we were yet to the northward of Wilkesbarre, and no sooner had we emerged from the river than we heard from behind us a voice say in English:

"They haven't got below here, that much is certain; but now to prevent them from landing."

Then came a reply in the Indian tongue, which I failed to understand, and Master Bartlett whispered:

"It's a case of making our way into the thicket, lads, else are we taken to a certainty."

And so it was that we went forward blindly in the darkness, stumbling here over some fallen tree, or tripping there across a trailing vine, until it seemed as if we must give our pursuers good knowledge of where we were.

Then suddenly, believing there was before us only the thicket, we came full upon a stockade with such force that I was knocked backward two or three feet.

"Where are we?" Giles March whispered, and I replied, heeding not the fact that we had with us one more familiar with the country than ourselves:

"I know not, save it be we have wandered back to Pittstown," whereupon he asked, irritably:

"How can that be, Jonathan Ogden? We have come with the current, and not against it."

"This must be a fort which Jonathan should know full well, since it bears his own name," Master Bartlett said, quietly.

"Fort Ogden!" I exclaimed, and there came to my mind the memory of how proud I had been when the stockade was built, and the people decided it should be named in honor of my father, who had given his life for the Cause at the battle of Long Island.

"Then we are with friends," Giles cried, exultantly, feeling his way along the logs to come at the gate, "and from here to Wilkesbarre is but a short distance, if we are not minded to stay."

Master Bartlett held his peace, and I thought it strange that he should not give way to joy, when for the second time were we come as if from out the very jaws of death.

Groping with our hands, because the darkness was so intense that we could not see even the trees

in front of us, we made our way around the wall of logs until come to the entrance.

The gates were open; the enclosure vacant save for the small blockhouse which stood, as I knew, on the western side.

"Have they all been killed?" Giles asked, in a tone of horror, and Master Bartlett replied:

"Nay, lad, that isn't probable. Fort Jenkins was the first stockade John Butler would desire to take, and this could well be left until that work was accomplished. I dare venture to say you will find those who garrisoned this place in Forty Fort, for, if you remember, Elias Shendle told us that that stockade had been decided upon as the rendezvous for all in the valley, and the people are wise to gather at one place rather than try to hold many."

"Then, if you are right, are we like to find Wyoming Fort" (by which I meant the Wilkesbarre stockade) "in the same condition, and we would be no better off to go there."

"Our course lies across the river," Master Bartlett said, decidedly, "and there is no reason why we should linger here any longer than may be necessary for you to regain your strength."

"Then let our stay be short, if it rests with me," Giles March said, quickly. "I am as fit for a tramp or a swim now as I ever shall be; but first we must go farther down the river, in order to give the slip to those who were hunting us as if we were wild ducks."

He had no more than spoken, when we were startled into silence by hearing in the distance a noise such as might have been made by a large animal forcing his way through the thicket, and straightway Master Bartlett whispered:

"Those who were hunting us like wild ducks have taken up the scent in right good shape. Unless we can bar these gates, it is a matter of skulking in the woods, with the chances against us."

Even the old man made a mistake when he proposed that we take refuge there, nor were Giles and I any the wiser, for, springing into the enclosure, we set about swinging the heavy barricades of logs into place, and fastening them with the bars which yet remained near at hand.

Then it was, while we were waiting breathlessly to learn if those who were on our trail would discover the refuge, that I began to realize what had been done.

We were without weapons, already nearly starved, and had shut ourselves in this place like rats in a trap. If, peradventure, those who were coming got an inkling of our situation, and it stood to reason they would know we could have no firearms after taking to the river, our capture would be but the work of a few moments.

Even while such thoughts were in my mind, it was possible to hear footsteps, and now and then a smothered exclamation, as those who were advancing tripped or fell, and Master Bartlett gripped my

arm in a manner which told that he had come to understand much the same as had I.

Then we heard from the outside the same voices which had come to our ears from the river:

"You were right, Sam; the rebels decided that they could hold this place, and mayhap there are more inside than the three whom we have followed."

"It won't take long to smoke them out," another voice replied, and the first speaker said:

"There is no need of running our noses into danger when the work can be done safely. Go back for half a dozen more men, — tell them there is rare sport to be had here, and in the meanwhile we'll see to it the cubs don't give us the slip."

"We have made fools of ourselves," Master Bartlett whispered, "and I am the one who is to blame for our getting into this trap. An idiot should have had better sense than to have walked in here, knowing he was being followed."

"But why do we stay?" Giles asked. "In a few minutes these fellows will have surrounded the stockade, and then there can be no choice in the matter. It shouldn't be difficult to scale the wall at the other end, and take our chances in the woods, rather than stay here until they choose to drag us out."

I could have cried aloud with vexation because I had been so simple as to settle it firmly in my mind that there was no further chance of escape

for us. Giles had spoken wisely, and it would be folly to do other than as he suggested.

Master Bartlett, touching each of us in turn, for it was so dark that we could not distinguish the movements of the one nearest us, crept cautiously in the direction of which Giles had spoken, and soon the three of us were stealing swiftly along, able to do so silently because there was nothing to impede our progress over ground which had been beaten hard by the tramp of many feet.

Giles reached the northern wall before either Master Bartlett or myself came up, and, when we stood against the logs, he was already on top of the stockade, waiting to give us a hand up.

Because the old man could not move as nimbly as either of us lads, I did what I could toward lifting him, while Giles pulled from above, and in this fashion we got him over, after which it was a simple matter for me to climb up by aid of the platform, when I dropped to the ground on the opposite side.

We were in the thicket once more; but the night was so dark, as I have already said, that it was impossible to move swiftly and at the same time surely. I certainly was not woodsman enough to be able to keep on a straight course while travelling rapidly in the night.

Master Bartlett must have distrusted his own powers in this direction, for he whispered, after

we had crept away from the stockade as we would from a place of deadliest danger:

"It's a case of trusting to luck now, lads, and going blindly. So that we do not double back on our tracks, we may be able to give those fellows the slip and a fairly hard night's work, for, believing we are yet inside, they will spend no little time and labor in gaining entrance without exposing themselves to what they believe may be danger."

It must not be supposed that we had halted near by where John Butler's Tories could overhear what was said. Before either of us spoke, we put at least twenty yards between ourselves and the walls of the fort, and even then conversed only in faintest whispers.

I tried to keep in mind a general idea of the country, so that we might have, when it came time to rest, some knowledge of our location. We left the stockade at the northern end; the river should be at our left, and the only safe course lay straight to the right. If we could travel in a fairly direct line half an hour or more, there was good reason for believing we would be near the mountains, and safe from pursuit. Then, when day came, it would go hard if we were unable to retrace our steps.

I had no idea of the passage of time, but staggered on as best I could until Master Bartlett gave the word to halt, by saying:

"I'm allowing, lads, that we need go no farther. If the Tories had followed us, we should have heard

something from them by this time. Let's sit down for the night, and Jonathan and I will thank the good God that Giles wasn't as thick-headed as we, else all of us would be in the stockade awaiting certain capture."

Under ordinary circumstances I would not have considered it a hardship to spend one night, or a dozen of them for that matter, in the woods, especially while the weather was so warm that one needed no covering; but now, weak from lack of food, and wearied with exertion and excitement, I felt as if our plight was indeed sad when we stretched ourselves out at the foot of a huge tree, with the idea of trying to gain some repose.

As when we were suffering with thirst, Master Bartlett tried to beguile the time by telling of his experiences while suffering even greater hardships than we were then striving to endure in silence, but I could give no heed to his words.

If the Tories had made plans to seek sport by hunting wretched fugitives who had been driven by their wolfish allies from Fort Jenkins, and could deliberately wait around on the river for them to come down, as does the hunter for the deer to visit the salt-lick, then might we with a certainty know that more than one of those who fled from the stockade had been taken, and, being taken by such a crew, would most likely have been turned over to the tender mercies of the Indians.

Although I had good reason to believe that Elias

Shendle had been captured, if indeed he was not killed outright during the fight, I strove not to dwell upon such a possibility.

Taking one's bodily condition, together with the grief in his heart because of the possible fate of others, it was difficult to bear up under what might at another time have been borne with something like fortitude, and the tears were near to overflowing my eyelids when Giles March said, hopefully:

"I'm counting that two hours' work to-morrow will bring us to Forty Fort. After knowing what we do about Fort Ogden, let us agree that the stockade at Wilkesbarre has been abandoned, and say that we must gain the appointed rendezvous before finding ourselves among friends. Now think it over. A tramp of not more than two hours at the most, then a swim across the river, and perhaps another hour's walk, after which we are where we can rest and eat, — at least until John Butler takes it into his head to make an attack."

It was such talk as that which I needed to hearten me, for I am free to confess that then my courage was well-nigh gone, and, putting aside with an effort all the forebodings which had come over me since we halted, I discussed with Giles and Master Bartlett the course which we should pursue when day dawned.

Some one has said that "the darkest night always has an end," but before the sun rose again it did verily seem to me as if that time of dark-

ness would never pass, yet the day broke with not a cloud in the sky, and, looking out from where we had thrown ourselves down, it was difficult to believe that our peaceful valley was overrun by those who would murder and burn through fiendish love of cruelty.

When I would have hunted around among the leaves to find something with which to fill my mouth, for the day had so far come that we could see surrounding objects distinctly, Master Bartlett said, with more of authority in his tones than I had ever heard him use:

"Now then, lad, nothing of that kind. I have seen many a good man use himself up by chewing whatsoever he might find in the woods. Better suck your thumbs a few hours longer, and then we'll sit down to corn bread and smoked meat with all the keener appetite."

"The sooner we begin the quicker will we come to the end," Giles cried, with a feeble attempt at a laugh. "Suppose you lead the way, Master Bartlett, while Jonathan and I watch out to see if you wander from a straight course."

And thus we started, thinking it was only a question of endurance before we would come to our destination, and little heeding the possible dangers in our path.

We stumbled on like those who are drunken, because of the weakness which beset us. More than once did Giles call a halt that we might decide

whether or no Master Bartlett was not making a détour to the right or left instead of keeping straight on toward where the river would be found. But never once did we say to each other that our ideas of the country, because of the darkness when we fled so hastily, might be wrong, until the moment came when we found ourselves climbing higher and higher.

Then there could no longer be any question but that, instead of going toward the river, we had turned our backs upon it, and were come to the mountains.

CHAPTER VIII.

WICKED FOLLY

It is beyond the power of words to describe the sensations which I experienced on learning that, instead of having advanced toward where it would be possible to obtain food, we had been going directly away from it.

What with the excitement of the battle and the flight, the fatigue of swimming and walking, and, above all, the wearing strain of anxiety as to the fate of our friends, I was no longer in a condition to fight against fate after receiving this last blow.

"It is better to die here in peace than struggle farther with the good chance of finally being tortured at the stake!" I exclaimed, throwing myself on the ground, and Giles March flung himself headlong beside me, as if it was no longer within his power to speak.

It was Master Bartlett who aroused us from the dangerous mood into which we were allowing ourselves to drift, and I afterward came to realize that, when we gave aid to him, we were but struggling to preserve the one who should save us from such a death as would have brought shame to our names,

for he who ceases to fight simply because the odds are heavy against him is indeed a coward.

"I'm willing to grant, lads, that it looks as if we had fallen into hard lines," the old man said, after giving Giles and me time in which to realize that we had the same as surrendered at a moment when our best efforts were needed. "The question is, however, whether you are willing to die here, as do the brutes, without reasoning, leaving our friends in the valley to call in vain for your services, or, if you can, as brave men should, fight against the weakness of your bodies so long as the last ounce of strength remains?"

"It is not possible for me to make my way through the thicket to the river," I said, in despair. "When we set off all so boldly, I was well-nigh at the end of my rope, and now am I done up in good truth."

"If that be the case, if you are indeed at the end of your strength, then is there nothing left but to meet death with a smile on your lips, as should a lad who bears the name of Ogden. It is not well to show the white feather at the last moment, when, as you have said, it is possible to die in peace," Master Bartlett said, mockingly. "It will be time for me to surrender when I can no longer raise a hand toward helping myself, and, because I am yet able to keep on my feet, I count on fighting against fate many hours longer."

Then the old man turned as if to go away, and I,

shamed by his words, although not willing to admit it, asked in a whisper, as if it was no longer within my power to speak aloud:

"What are you about to do?"

"Look for food first, since that seems necessary before I can hope to push on much farther while my stomach makes such an outcry," he said, cheerily, and I asked again:

"How will you find it here among the hills?"

"When I was a lad living on the frontier, not yet as old as you, powder was precious, and difficult to get, even when one had that with which to pay for it. Then it was possible to snare game sufficient to keep others besides myself from starvation, and I am counting on making the same effort now. If the Tories hold the river, I will live here until they have given over searching for fugitives, and then make my way across, where every man with life in his body is needed."

As he said this, Giles March suddenly sprang to his feet, crying:

"We are not needing any more of a tongue-lashing, Master Bartlett. I am well ashamed of myself for having been so simple, and Jonathan Ogden is of the same mind. None save a fool would lie down to die when but a few miles separated him from his friends! Tell us what is to be done, and you will see that we can hold our own with you."

It would have been strange indeed if I had not

been stung into action by this time, and on the instant I stood beside Giles.

"Now are you true lads of the valley!" the old man cried, in delight. "I can well understand how much of despair came when we found ourselves back among the hills, and stronger men than you have made the same fatal mistake of yielding before the last ounce of strength has been spent. Now that you are come to your senses, let us decide upon what seems the best course, and then hold to it. We will begin by resting a bit, after which our heads will be the clearer."

Then the old man threw himself down at the foot of a huge tree, and we lads followed his example, when he said, as if having forgotten our folly:

"Mayhap it was for the best that we got turned about. The Tories who chased us into Fort Ogden know that some of us who left the stockade yet remain on this side the river, and are doubtless hunting for us. We will have a better chance of getting across after four and twenty hours have passed, and shall then be in fair shape for whatsoever of a struggle may be necessary, if in the meantime we can pick up something to stay the gnawing in our stomachs."

Then the old man began explaining how we might be able to snare such small game as rabbits among the mountains, and to speculate as to the possibility of catching a coon or a hedgehog, for

anything in the way of meat would be welcomed by us, until my cheeks glowed red with shame because I, who called myself captain of the Minute Boys, had lacked the courage which he was showing.

While he was thus heartening, and at the same time covering us with confusion, we were startled by hearing a noise in the thicket as if a number of people were approaching, and straightway forgetting that I had so lately resigned myself to death, I drew my knife while creeping behind the tree, determined to sell life dearly, for there was no question in my mind but that the Tories were hunting us down.

Then, an instant later, I cried aloud in surprise, for Daniel Hinchman and his sister Esther came in view, and, before either of us could speak, we saw that they were followed by two women and as many children.

"How did you get here?" Giles cried, in joyful surprise, as he sprang forward to where Daniel was standing in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Esther and I left the stockade hand in hand," Daniel said, when it was possible for him to speak. "She had refused to go with the women and children, and was waiting for me near the gate. We drifted down-stream clinging to a dead tree, until learning that the Tories were on the lookout for any who might have escaped the Indians, and then I took to this shore, for there was no other way

open. We had no more than landed when we came across Mistress Morley and one of her neighbors, as you see. We were minded to make our way into the Pittstown stockades, but before travelling very far found that the savages were in the thicket close about, therefore turned back. How is it you are here?"

Giles told Daniel of our adventures, but without speaking of the cowardice he and I had shown, and wound up the story by saying, with the ghost of a smile on his lips:

"It looks much as if the Minute Boys had taken it into their heads to rendezvous here, and we need only wait in order to have so many of the company as are yet alive in line. Do you know if Elias Shendle came out of the fight?"

"I have seen nothing of him since that moment when the Indians poured in upon us," Daniel replied, sadly.

The two women, hearing that we had halted because of weariness caused by lack of food, drew from the pockets of their dresses a small quantity of corn bread, which they had brought from the stockade that the children might not cry with hunger when silence was necessary for the safety of all, and urged that we eat it.

I looked shamefacedly at Giles for an instant, and then said, emphatically, inwardly resolving that never again would I complain of needing food:

"It would choke me to take bread from the

mouths of babes. Keep what you have, Mistress Morley, lest the children be in worse plight than they are even now. Giles March and I are about to do what we may at snaring game of some kind, and if so be we can find means to kindle a fire, we'll not long be hungry."

With that, Mistress Morley drew from her pocket flint and steel, as she said with an effort at cheeriness:

"When we were making ready to leave the stockade, I had it in mind that these might be needed, and it only remains for Master Bartlett to find that which shall serve as tinder, in order for us to build as much of a fire as it may be safe to make."

"If the women, who have children to care for, can hold their courage at such a time as this, then have you and I shown ourselves unfit ever to perform the duties of men," Giles March said to me as we started out in search of game, and I replied, sorrowfully:

"Let us try to forget it, else we shall be unable to hold up our heads again. From this out I will never tell in Master Bartlett's hearing of what I hope to do, lest he remind me of this time when I showed myself a fool as well as a coward."

"There is yet time for us to wipe out the stain, and from this on will I welcome danger, however great, because of the chance to show Master Bartlett that it was our bodies, rather than our hearts, which gave way."

Then, as if we had agreed to hold our peace regarding the folly, we spoke of it no more, but set about finding something which might serve as food.

There is no good reason why I should tell of the long search, or of our efforts to capture the coon which finally showed himself. It is enough to say that, within less than two hours from the time of setting out, we returned with meat enough for one meal, and had set a dozen or more snares, using trailing vines in the stead of twine.

When we were come to the big tree where our friends had halted, no one was to be seen, and a sickening fear came into my heart lest they had been taken by the Tory hunters; but, even as we stood looking with dismay into each other's faces, Daniel Hinchman appeared before us.

"Master Bartlett has found what will serve as camp during such time as the women may be forced to stay here, and there it will be safe to build a fire that we may roast the meat."

We went with him, arriving after a walk of five minutes at a sort of cave under a shelving rock, on the side of the mountain where, thanks to a thick screen of bushes, a party much larger than ours could remain hidden from view of any who might pass without making careful search.

Another night was come before we had satisfied our hunger, and then once more did I feel able to do my full share of the work necessary for the

defence of the valley, if so be we might get across the river.

Master Bartlett, mindful of others rather than himself, had gathered fir-tips and leaves in sufficient quantity to form beds for the little ones, who fell asleep as soon as they had eaten, and now he was making ready to take some rest.

"I am thinking that this refuge is safer than Forty Fort, unless it so chance the Congress begins to understand how sore is our need," Daniel Hinchman began, as if he had something more in mind, and Master Bartlett replied, sleepily:

"Ay, lad, there is little chance either Tory or Indian will come thus far among the mountains in search of victims, and here we may remain in safety until such time as it is possible to cross the river."

"If more of food could be had, I would rather Esther stayed here than to go farther in search of what may not be found in our valley for many days," Daniel continued, and Master Bartlett, rising on his elbow, asked, sharply:

"Tell us what it is you have in mind, lad, and without so much beating about the bush."

"How far think you it may be from here to the river?" Daniel asked, without answering the question.

"Not above five miles at the most."

"Then it is in my mind to set off at once, leaving you here. If matters on the other side of the river are as they should be, it will not cost much

labor to come back for the party, while, if the danger has increased, — meaning if the enemy is attacking Forty Fort, — the women and children had better be here than there."

"You are in the right, Daniel Hinchman, and both Jonathan Ogden and I will go with you," Giles March cried, quickly. "Master Bartlett shall stay to look after the women; he should be able to find where we have set our snares, and I am counting that by morning he will have a fresh supply of meat."

I fully expected to hear the old man make some outcry against such a plan; but he held his peace, as if well content we should do as Daniel had suggested, and there was nothing to prevent us from setting off at once.

"Look well about you before venturing to cross the river," Master Bartlett called, as we walked away, and a moment later we were stumbling along through the thicket, unable to distinguish with our eyes even the trees directly in our path.

We walked in single file, each fellow striving to keep the others on a straight course, and had gone no more than half a mile from the place of refuge, when a low moan, coming from a clump of bushes directly in front of us, caused a sudden halt.

There was no fear the noise could have been made by an enemy in the hope of tricking us, for, without weapons as we were, our capture or death

might readily have been compassed, and I, who chanced just at that time to be in the advance, asked in a low tone:

"Who is there?"

"A lad by name of Samuel Rogers," was the reply.

I was overwhelmed with surprise, for he was one of the two lads who had left the stockade to go out hunting, and was supposed to have escaped by crossing the river when the Indians captured John Coburn and Oscar Stephenson.

In a twinkling we were by his side, where he lay in a dense thicket, and, before making any effort to learn if he was hurt, I cried:

"How did you get here? We believed that you escaped into the Pittstown stockades."

"So I did," was the reply; "but when the men there made ready to go to Forty Fort, knowing they were all too weak to hold the place in case an attack was made, I did my best to rejoin you, and was come to the shore opposite Fort Jenkins when the retreat began. Then I kept on, thinking to cross from Wilkesbarre, where likely a canoe could be found; but stumbled upon a party of Tories near Fort Ogden, and, while taking to my heels, was shot through the leg. I gave them the slip, however, but had just come to believe I should die here like a dog, for verily I can go no farther."

"He has his musket and ammunition!" Giles March cried, joyfully, as he came upon the gun

by chance. "Now there need be no fear those whom we have left behind will starve while we are away!"

In few words I told Samuel why we were there, and then, as a matter of course, we set about getting him back to the cave.

It was a long, difficult task to carry the wounded lad back through the thicket; but we succeeded after a time, and surely it seemed as if God was with us, for we came out at the big tree without making a turn, which was more than I would have believed possible even in the daytime, when we might see the landmarks.

"We'll hope you find more of the company on this side the river, though not in such sore straits," Master Bartlett said, when aroused from his slumber as we entered the cave. "The women and I will look after his hurts, so you need not linger here."

"This shall be left, so you may not lack for food," and Giles thrust the musket and horns into the old man's hands, after which we hurried away lest he should insist that we take the weapon for our better protection.

There was a song of thanksgiving in my heart when we set our faces once more in the direction of where we believed the river could be found, and there was good reason for rejoicing, because, except for our troubles, Sam Rogers would have suffered a lingering death alone in the thicket.

"It's a good omen," Daniel Hinchman said, in a tone of satisfaction. "We shall succeed in what we are undertaking, and mayhap yet be able to give aid to those who are in sore need."

Heartened by the knowledge that we had, perhaps, been the means of saving a comrade's life, we pushed on with more confidence, and it could not have been much past midnight when we arrived on the bank of the river, having neither seen nor heard anything betokening danger during the blind march.

"Because of having no muskets, we shall not be hampered in the swimming," Giles March said, as we stood at the edge of the water to regain breath before breasting the current, and no better evidence was needed that he had gotten back his courage than that he could find cause for rejoicing when we would be defenceless on arriving at the opposite bank.

There is little need to say that we listened to make sure there were no boats between us and our goal before wading down into the water, and then all our wits and strength were needed to take us across against the strong current.

With one to aid the other, the passage was made after such exertion as left us unable to do more than crawl out of the water, and then it was necessary to lie at full-length on the bank a good half-hour before being able to set off in search of Forty Fort.

It was daylight before we were come to the end of our journey, and then our hearts were made glad indeed, for at the stockade we found six of our company safe and sound, they having been able to avoid the Tories who were in search of victims; but, alas, Elias Shendle was not among them.

Here, also, was Master Morley, and his joy can be imagined when we told him that his wife and two children were yet alive, comparatively safe.

We did not spend much time in listening to stories of escape; it was necessary we learn what might be the situation in order to send word back to Master Bartlett, and before coming to an end of gathering information our hearts were heavy with forebodings.

Counting old men, and small boys who could fire a musket, but without much idea of taking aim, there were not above three hundred who could be mustered from all the stockades, and these were talking boldly of giving battle to John Butler's force, thinking it would be possible to take him and his men by surprise.

When I first heard such talk made it seemed certain those who spoke were making sport of me; but before we had been inside the stockade half an hour, Daniel Hinchman sought me out to say:

"It is true, Jonathan Ogden, that these people really count on marching against Wintermoot's. Colonel Zebulon Butler is arguing against it as best he may, and five officers who have just come

from New Jersey are saying all they can to prevent this apology for an army from marching to certain death. I pray that you go among the reckless ones, telling them what you know of John Butler's strength, and whether there be any chance that it is possible to take him by surprise."

Then it was, before I could make reply, that Colonel Zebulon Butler himself came up, and asked, looking at me:

"Are you the lad who commands the Minute Boys?"

"I held the position of captain, sir, before we were driven out of Fort Jenkins, and now am I at a loss to say whether there is any longer a company which may be called Minute Boys."

"But you know somewhat of the doings in and around Wintermoot's, and can make a good guess as to how many of the enemy may be there?"

"Ay, sir, and so can Master Morley, Giles March, or Daniel Hinchman."

"Will you tell these hot-heads what you have seen, and set your comrades at the same task?"

As he asked, so we did, moving here and there, wherever we saw a number of men or boys gathered, and giving our story loudly, without waiting for an invitation to join in the conversation; but words were of no avail. Those who did not the same as accuse us of telling of that which was untrue, claimed that we had been frightened out of

our wits, and mistook a handful of savages for an entire army.

"It is of no use," I said to Master Morley, after a time, when we were come together by chance. "Verily, it seems as if the people had gone mad! The more we say the stronger is their determination to give battle — "

"Ay, lad, that has already been put to vote, and despite the entreaties of the officers from the army, it is decided to leave here at one o'clock."

I cried out in anger and grief, heedless of what I said, and one of those men whose voice had been loudest for an immediate advance, although he was a cripple who had never taken a step without his crutches for more than five years, called me a coward, declaring that we Minute Boys had no sooner seen the feathers of an Indian than we beat a retreat.

"Do not make reply," Master Morley said as he led me away by main strength, for I was minded to call upon my comrades to bear me out in the story I had told. "Though an hundred were to repeat what we have said, and there were a dozen lifeless bodies here as proof, such pig-heads as that fellow would still declare they knew better than any other. At one o'clock we shall march out to our death, and the women and children whom we leave behind will be at the mercy of those ravening wolves. Thank God, my dear ones are not on this side of the river!"

"Then you will go, knowing that we have no possible show of winning the battle?" I asked, and Master Morley replied, stoutly:

"That is my duty, lad. Because these people are fools, is no reason why we can remain idle when all in the valley march forth to battle."

Until this moment I had not realized that those of us who had escaped from Fort Jenkins must march back, even as those at Wintermoot's would have us do; but now I understood what our duty was, and as soon as might be did I call Giles and Daniel to where Master Morley and I stood.

"Some one must go back to where Master Bartlett is in hiding," I said sharply, for it was already so near noon that there was no time for argument, and I counted on their taking my words as a command. "There are weapons and ammunition here in plenty, and he who goes to carry the word of the folly to be done this day must take with him a full load, so that those who are alive to-morrow morning will have that with which to procure food, or defend themselves."

Neither of the lads questioned as to whether we were bound to go with the foolish ones; both seemed to believe as did Master Morley, that we could not hold back even while knowing how fatal such a move would be; but Giles March said:

"Who is to go back?"

"You, if you will," I replied quickly, wronging

the lad by fancying it would give him pleasure to thus avoid the danger.

"Not me!" he cried, shrilly. "I will not have it said that I was too much of a coward to follow yonder party of cripples."

I looked at Daniel questioningly; but he shook his head as he said:

"My reason is the same as that given by Giles March."

"Draw lots for it," Master Morley suggested, "and then it can be said that he who goes does so against his will."

In order that the matter might be settled without further delay, I broke off four twigs, saying as I concealed them in my hand:

"He who draws the shortest will set out at once, and give his word to remain with those at the cave till this day's bloody work has come to an end, or John Butler has worked his will on the valley."

"They are not for me," Master Morley said sharply, when I held the twigs toward him. "I am not bound to you, lads, and therefore do not take chances with you. Besides," he added, as a new thought came to him, "I have no knowledge of where the hiding-place may be, and could not find it."

Without parleying I threw one of the twigs away, and held the remainder toward Giles. He

drew quickly; Daniel took the second, and the third remained in my hand.

We held up the twigs that all might see, and it was Daniel Hinchman who had the shortest.

One would have thought he had missed a great prize, instead of having been saved from much the same as death, for his face paled, and he turned away quickly, as if to hide a tear.

"Do not lose any time in setting out," I said, again sharply, lest he plead to remain. "Take at least two muskets, and let the remainder of your burden be made up of ammunition. If it so chance that either of us three be left alive and free when this day's work is done, we will join you at the cave. It seems to me well you and Master Bartlett should be on the watch for fugitives, beginning at sunset, for some of these people must escape death, and perhaps gain the opposite shore."

"I will go to find a boat, so that he may set himself across the river, without danger of wetting the powder," Giles March said, as he hurried away, and Master Morley and I went with Daniel to make certain he got that which was so sorely needed by those in hiding.

CHAPTER IX.

DISASTER

We loaded Daniel Hinchman with all he could lug through the thicket, and more than it would be possible for him to carry comfortably; but the need of those of us who lived through the day would be so great for weapons of defence that we did not hesitate to overburden him.

Giles March had no trouble in finding a canoe, for there were scores of them drawn up on the shore, and many would be unclaimed when night came.

I was in a fever of impatience for Daniel to be gone, lest some of those who were so eager to come against the overwhelming force under command of John Butler urge him to remain, and we bundled the weapons and ammunition into the boat hurriedly, pushing the light craft from the shore almost before he had entered it.

"Make all speed!" I cried, as he began to ply the paddle vigorously lest he be carried too far down-stream. "At the best possible pace, with such a load, you cannot hope to reach the cave before the unequal battle has begun, and within

a very short time after that our people will be seeking refuge from the knives and hatchets of the savages. You and Master Bartlett should be able to save more than one life 'twixt now and sunset."

He waved his hand in reply, as if not daring to trust himself to speak, and then we turned away, lest our standing there should attract the attention of those who might hail him.

Even now, when we were committed to the foolish venture, we continued to argue against the plan which had been decided upon, trying to prove to the ignorant hot-heads how impossible it would be to surprise a commander who had already begun his savage warfare; but only a few would listen to us, and even these turned away when we were done, as if believing they had spent their time on cowards.

Colonel Zebulon Butler, and the army officers who were with him, appeared to be the only ones who did not believe it possible for our three hundred cripples to overcome John Butler's eleven hundred wolves; but these military men, like us from Fort Jenkins, would go with the undisciplined mob, preferring to meet death than have it said they refused to obey the call to arms at such a time.

From the moment when it was seen that there was no hope of convincing the foolish ones of their error until near to one o'clock, the officers worked industriously, trying to get the motley gathering into something like shape, and then the people were

divided into six companies, each with a military man at its head.

We three, together with the six Minute Boys whom we had found at Forty Fort, were in that division led by Captain Durkee. Colonel Zebulon Butler was in command of the apology for an army, and Major Garratt stood second in rank.

We set out from the stockade at the time agreed upon, leaving behind the women and children unprotected, and it was much like absolutely abandoning them.

"Even though the battle does not go against us, the chances are that those poor creatures will fall victims to the savages before any of this mob can return," Master Morley said, sorrowfully, as he looked back at the helpless ones, and then we tried to put from our minds all else save the determination to fight desperately so long as our people could be kept together.

Our straggling column had no more than gotten under way before it was joined by the justices of the courts and others holding office in the valley, as if we were going out to serve writs of ejectment rather than to offer ourselves as victims to John Butler's murderers.

It was not until near to four o'clock that we arrived within sight of Wintermoot's, and then my comrades and I were literally bewildered at seeing the stockade in flames, as if the enemy had applied the torch lest we should succeed in capturing it.

"Can it be that John Butler, half-savage, half-brute that he is, fears what this collection of cripples may be able to do?" Giles March asked, in astonishment, and Master Morley replied:

"He doubtless fears that we are coming in some large force. If his scouts brought in word that all the people of the valley were making ready to march against him, he, knowing they had had a good chance to learn of his strength, believed they were mustered in overwhelming numbers. The loss of Wintermoot's won't be serious to him, since he can soon have his pick of all the stockades in the valley."

A few moments later we came in view of the enemy, drawn up in a line which extended from the river just above Wintermoot's to the swamp at the foot of the hills, and then we were halted that some of our officers might advance to select a position for the battle.

We were within musket-shot of the enemy, yet they did not molest us while we were making preparations for a fight, and again Master Morley had an explanation ready:

"John Butler is well content to await our movements since it will thus be possible for him to see in what force we have come, and, later, he can make his arrangements accordingly."

Ten minutes afterward we were brought up to where the officers who had selected the battle-

ground were standing, and, when each company had wheeled into line, Colonel Zebulon said, gravely:

"Men, yonder is the enemy. We have come out here to fight, not only for liberty, but for life itself, and, what is dearer, to preserve our homes from conflagration, our women and children from the tomahawk. Stand firm at the first shock, and the Indians will give way. Every man to his duty!"

John Butler, stripped of his feathers and other trappings, with a handkerchief tied around his head, stood with his so-called Rangers near the river bank; the Indians and Tories were in line to his right as far as the swamp. Johnson's Greens were just behind the Tories, as if to keep them from running away, while here and there along the entire front were Indians with rifles, who would probably have called themselves sharpshooters.

In a low tone our officers ordered us to advance a single pace each time we emptied our muskets, and to take careful aim instead of firing at random.

Then we awaited the word, which seemed to me a long time coming, for it was mighty hard on one's nerves to stand there facing those who had come to ravage the valley, knowing that within a few seconds we would be engaged in what must necessarily be a life or death struggle.

"When the battle is over, unless by some queer chance we should have the best of it, if you lads are yet alive, retreat toward the north until you are half a mile or more up-stream, and then make the

effort to cross," Master Morley said, in a whisper. "If possible, I shall follow close at your heels; but, in case I cannot, and either of you live to see my dear ones, tell them that I could do no less than die when our neighbors demanded the sacrifice."

It was well for me that we got the word to open fire just then, for my knees were beginning to tremble beneath me, and in another moment it might have been possible for my comrades to see that I was not holding myself any too bravely.

It was as if John Butler had instructed his men to take the word of command from Colonel Zebulon, for both armies fired at the same moment, and each advanced one pace.

Then, because of the gaps which had been cut in our lines and the wounded who writhed on the ground at our feet, we could not move forward when next our weapons were discharged, but stood as best we might, firing and loading with all possible speed.

How long we remained there exchanging shots, I am unable to say, although it seemed to me a very long while; but Master Morley maintains that it was not above twenty minutes, and then I could see dimly through the dense clouds of smoke that the Indians nearest the swamp were moving down toward the ruins of the fort.

I was on the point of speaking to Captain Durkee, who was not more than ten paces from me,

to tell him what I had seen, when that officer pitched forward on his face dead, and a man in my rear came upon me in his dying struggles so violently that I was thrown to the ground, covered with blood, causing Giles March to utter a cry of horror, believing I had been killed.

By the time I regained my feet and cleared the blood from my eyes, the Johnson Greens had begun an advance, and we were forced to put forth every effort lest they should overrun us, therefore did the movement of the savages pass from my mind.

For a time the battle raged nearabout our company as hotly as I have ever known. More than once we grappled with those who had come within arm's length, and, while our companions were cut down on either hand, neither Master Morley, Giles March, or I had received a scratch. Twice had one or the other saved my life when I was overmatched by some big Tory, who chose me for an antagonist because I was the smallest, and more than once I did the same service for them.

Then, while we were the same as drunken men from the fumes of burning powder and the excitement of the battle, that company to the left of us set up a shout of dismay, as the bullets began to come from the rear.

I understood then the meaning of that movement of the savages which I had seen. The red wolves had crept along the edge of the swamp until the yet smouldering ruins of Wintermoot's Fort hid

them from view, and then made a dash which brought them in the rear of the left of our line, where Colonel Dennison was in command.

Even above the din of the conflict I heard him give the word for his men to fall back, and understood that such manœuvre was for the purpose of changing position in order to meet the foe who had outflanked him; but his men, among whom were a goodly number of those who had cried the loudest to be led against the enemy, mistook — or afterward claimed that they did — the command, believing he had said "retreat."

In an instant that terrible word rang out along the entire line which, up to this time, had inflicted even more injury than had been received, and in a twinkling three men out of every four were facing to the rear.

Not an officer belonging to our company was left alive, and Master Morley, believing he might stem the tide, leaped in front of those who had begun to run, as he shouted:

"Stand to your duty, you men of Wyoming! This battle was of your own seeking, and will you run away when we are more than holding our own?"

Giles March and I added our voices to his, but with no avail. The hotheads, who would not listen to us when we begged that they remain in Forty Fort, were alike heedless of our entreaties as we urged them to stand firm, and all the while the

"'STAND FIRM . . . AND THE VICTORY IS OURS.'"

enemy was pouring in a shower of lead that the panic might be increased.

Colonel Zebulon, who was the only mounted officer, rode up and down the line, regardless of the fact that he was exposing himself to the fire of all John Butler's force, as he cried, imploringly:

"Don't leave me, my children! Stand firm one half-hour longer, and the victory is ours!"

He might as well have appealed to the wind, expecting to still it; with each second of time the men grew more and more frantic with fear, until they were no longer thinking, reasoning creatures, but blind people, crazed by terror brought about through their own folly.

It seemed to me as if no more than three minutes passed from the time Colonel Dennison gave the order to fall back, before we of the Minute Boys who yet remained alive were in the midst of a panic-stricken throng which carried us, despite all our efforts, past the ruins of Wintermoot's toward the settlement from which, in our folly, we had come to measure strength with John Butler's wolves.

Behind us came a horde of yelling, exultant demons, striking with knives or tomahawks in vengeful glee, and killing more during the first five minutes of that unreasoning retreat than had been possible all the time the battle lasted.

"Work over toward the swamp!" Master Morley shouted in my ear, as we were borne along

against our will. "It is certain death to remain with this mob; our only show is to get back in the rear of John Butler's line!"

I did not then understand how this might be done, even though we succeeded in gaining the swamp; but I had every confidence in the man's judgment, and, gripping Giles March's arm because there was not time to explain to him the plan, I fought desperately against my own neighbors of the valley until we were on the western edge of the panic-stricken crowd.

Then Master Morley, brushing past me and at the same time striking down a savage who, having outstripped his fellows, had aimed a blow at my head, ran at his best pace in an oblique line toward the swamp.

It seemed to me as if we would never gain that fringe of deeper green which marked the edge of the morass, nor could we have done so but for the fact that the Indians were delayed in the chase by killing and scalping, and then, when it was as if my breath had gone entirely, we plunged knee-deep into the mud and water.

"A little farther, lad, and then you'll have time to breathe," Master Morley said, as he seized me by the hand, and I was literally dragged behind the sheltering foliage.

Because our people were so crazed that they fled in a body, as does a drove of sheep, we might have been pursued, but, where there were so many vic-

tims, the human wolves could not spend time to search for three when it might be possible to kill a dozen, therefore did we escape.

There are nights even now when, in my sleep, I see that plain covered with dead bodies, and hear again the horrible yells of fiendish glee and screams of pain, as one and another of those whom I had known and held converse with were cut down in the flight. Again I run desperately, panting for breath, and see behind me the uplifted knife dripping blood, or the tomahawk crimsoned with the life fluid of my friends.

Please God I may never again be called upon to take part in such a horror, beside which the bloodiest battle that was ever fought is commonplace.

It was Master Morley who took command immediately we were screened from view by the bushes, and neither Giles nor I had any mind to question his authority.

We had filled our stomachs and pockets with food while at Forty Fort, but, even though I had been on the verge of starvation, it would have been impossible to swallow a mouthful while all that horrible scene was before me, — while the shrieks of those who were being murdered still rang in my ears, and, when Master Morley asked if we would eat before continuing the flight, I was sickened.

We remained within earshot of all those dreadful cries not more than three minutes, — only long

enough for me to get back my wind, and then Master Morley plunged yet farther into the swamp, we following as best we might until, as nearly as could be judged, we were a mile or more to the northward of Wintermoot's.

Then we halted until night was come, and, while lying there in the water and mud, Master Morley told us what he would do in order to circle around John Butler's fiends, who by this time must have been literally drunken with blood. He claimed to be able to lead us to the river as well in the darkness as when the sun was shining, and we were only too glad to do as he proposed.

When we were finally clear of the swamp, so far from the battle-field that no sound either of anguish or exultation could be heard, it struck me that the country looked familiar, and I began to fear it might have been possible, in our fear and horror, we had turned toward the south instead of the north, when suddenly we came upon what had once been Fort Jenkins, but was now only blackened ruins.

The enemy made no attempt to hold it when we Minute Boys were forced to retreat, but had applied the torch, and that which had cost the people of Wyoming so much of labor was but a marking of half-burned logs.

"We are now opposite the Pittstown stockades," Giles March said, speaking for the first time since this second portion of our flight had been resumed.

"Think you we would have any chance of safety by going there?"

"It is better that we make for the cave, as has been agreed upon," Master Morley said, hoarsely, and I knew full well how he was hungering to see, once more, those whom he had never expected to greet again. "We shall then be where the enemy has little idea of finding victims, and there are not enough men now left in all the valley to hold the best stockade that was ever built against John Butler's curs, who are well-nigh mad with the taste of blood."

We made no further question as to what we would do, but continued on to the river; and there, when I would have plunged in to swim across without delay, Master Morley checked me as he said:

"The ammunition is too precious to be wasted. We must first build such a raft as will carry our muskets and powder-horns, and then push it before us as we swim."

We worked feverishly, not knowing how soon the bloodthirsty brutes might come back to see if there had been any poor wretches left behind with sufficient of life in them to afford pleasure by their torture, and perhaps no more than five minutes were spent before, forcing the small raft in front of us, we waded out into the black waters.

"Now is the time when we must strain every muscle, lest we be carried down on Monocasy

Island," Master Morley said, as we struck out, and, surprised by the words, I asked:

"Why should we not rest ourselves on the island? It will be a long pull against this vicious current, and we shall need to regain our wind."

"To my mind Monocasy Island is become no more than a trap to catch those who, outstripping the others, took to the river with much the same idea that we have, and it is there the savages will seek fresh victims."

As he ceased speaking, Master Morley struck out vigorously, minded, as I believed, to aid us in the swimming.

I could not put much faith in the proposition that John Butler's wolves would bethink themselves of the island, and, therefore, but for what our leader had said, should have sought refuge on that small spot of land; but because of having given my word to do as he directed, I strained every muscle to stem the current.

Work as we might, it was impossible to gain the eastern shore before coming near Monocasy, and, when we were within a hundred yards or more of it, good proof was had that Master Morley had not made any mistake.

From three or four points of the small island could be heard shrieks and cries, and we knew only too well that the savages, and most likely the Tories as well, were hunting down their human game.

Thanks to the darkness of the night and our

distance from the island, we were not discovered while drifting past; but, before having gotten so far down-stream as to be beyond hearing of the dreadful work, our feet touched the bottom.

It can well be supposed that we made all haste to get under cover, and, once hidden by the foliage, it was possible to see, on the western shore of the river, flames mounting to the sky in twenty places at the same time, telling of the homes which were given over to the torch by the orders of that king who claimed us as his subjects.

"And this is the end of the wicked folly!" Master Morley said, with a long-drawn sigh. "We are told that we should not speak ill of the dead; and, while it stands to reason that the greater number of those who were so eager to be led against John Butler's murdering followers are no longer in this world, yet I claim now, and always shall, that they alone are responsible for the crimes which have been committed since noon of the day just past."

"The whole valley will now be overrun; we can no longer call any place our home!" Giles March exclaimed, passionately, and I, understanding that such converse was but tending to make us faint-hearted, proposed that we set off for the cave.

"No one can say how soon the Tories may come this way in search of sport, as when we fled from Fort Jenkins, and it is well that we seek some safer refuge while there is an opportunity," I said, laying my hand on Giles's shoulder to arouse him from

the slough of despondency into which he had fallen.

"Our homes, until such as John Butler and his imps have been killed or driven out of the country, will be in the army, doing what we may against a king who would thus force love from his people," Master Morley said, sternly, and then it was I realized there was no other refuge for us in case we succeeded in getting out of the valley alive.

It was not a simple matter to find our way through the forest in the darkness, for there was nothing save a knowledge of the general direction to guide us; but we stumbled on as best we might, well content, since each step took us just so much farther away from the scene of murder.

Never once did we come across any rock or tree which could be recognized, and when we had travelled as long as it seemed would have been necessary had our course been the true one, I said, coming to a full stop:

"We may be going in a circle, as when Master Bartlett was leading, and I am of the mind that we halt here until morning rather than take the chances of coming upon the river bank again."

"This time Master Bartlett will lead you true, and there is no need of a halt until you are come to where can be had food and a bed," a voice from the thicket said, in cautious tones, and I made no effort to repress a cry of joy, for I knew it was the old man who had spoken.

"I have been back and forth here since Daniel Hinchman arrived," the old man said, as he made his way through the thicket to where we were standing. "Already have we picked up two of the Minute Boys who were among the missing since the retreat from Fort Jenkins, and there may be more than you hereabout who are searching for a hiding-place."

"Was Elias Shendle one of the two?" I asked, eagerly, and Master Bartlett shook his head mournfully.

"It is to be feared we are the only ones remaining on this side," Stephen Morley said, mournfully, and then, as a matter of course, Master Bartlett insisted on hearing of what had taken place.

Neither Giles March nor I had the heart to tell the dreadful story, and even Stephen Morley made it as brief as possible; but he told enough to give the old man an idea of the horrors we had seen, and said, in conclusion:

"No good can come of repeating such a tale in the hearing of the women, for they have already had enough to terrify them; therefore, when we reach the cave, let it be said we fought a pitched battle, and were beaten so sorely that it will no longer be possible to live in the valley until the Continental army has won for us our independence."

To that we all agreed, and then it was I asked

Master Bartlett for the names of the two Minute Boys whom he had found.

"One is that Miles Parker who lived down Hanover way, and the other is Oscar Stephenson, who is well crippled with a bullet-wound in the shoulder, received during our fight at the stockade."

"How is it that they strayed in this direction?" I asked, curiously.

"They drifted down-stream, according to their story, a long bit past here, and landed on this side, when Stephenson grew so weak that it was necessary to halt. Parker nursed him as best he could, and the two had set out again, hoping to find a boat in which they could cross, for Oscar was too weak to swim, when the din of the battle could be heard. They made for the mountains, and I came across them just in time, for the wounded lad was nearly done up."

Having made this explanation, the old man wheeled about to lead the way to the cave, and we followed, thanking God most fervently that our lives had been spared when so many were taken.

It was like a home-coming to meet those anxious ones who had been awaiting us, for here we were among friends, and shut out from the sickening horrors of the other shore.

There was no need to say that we had been beaten in battle, for our appearance told of flight, hurried and fearful. Mistress Morley flung her arms around her husband's neck as tears of joy and

relief streamed down her cheeks; and I, who had expected no womanly welcome, received one which raised, in some slight degree, the burden from my heart, when Esther Hinchman took both my hands in hers as she said:

"God has been good to let you come back to us."

CHAPTER X.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

DANIEL was not to be seen when we entered the cave, but Master Bartlett explained his absence by saying that he was out in search of game. That he had been at work industriously we could see, for there were the carcasses of two deer cut up and stacked inside, while near by were a dozen or more pheasants.

Even before making any attempt to tell such a story regarding the events of that fearful day as had been decided upon, Giles March and I gave attention to the wounded.

Samuel Rogers was resting comfortably on a pile of leaves at the farther end of the cave, and declared that he had improved wondrously since we brought him there, while Oscar Stephenson appeared to be suffering rather from exhaustion, caused by rapid travel and loss of blood, than from the bullet, which had ploughed its way through the flesh without breaking bones.

Having seen so much of killing during the day just past, I was actually surprised at learning how many of us had been spared from what was neither

more nor less than a massacre. The cave had seemed too large when we first found it; but now, with so many inside, it was all too small for comfortable living.

Lest the reader may have forgotten how many of us were here assembled, let me set down the list:

First, there was Mistress Morley, and the other woman whose name I do not now remember, with the two Morley children. Esther Hinchman made up the list of females.

Master Bartlett and Stephen Morley represented the men of the valley, and in addition we had of the Minute Boys, Daniel Hinchman, for we counted him as among us, Samuel Rogers, Giles March, Oscar Stephenson, Miles Parker, and myself.

I had not supposed so many of our company escaped the tomahawk and the scalping-knife until I saw them here assembled, and it was in my mind that we were more in numbers than all the others who had come out alive from the battle with John Butler's renegades and red wolves.

That Daniel Hinchman and Master Bartlett had worked like beavers during the absence of Giles March and myself, there could be no question. The cave, if such it could be called, had been cleared of rubbish, and that part of it to be used as sleeping quarters was covered with leaves and fir-tips.

To my great delight, during such house-cleaning a living spring at the farther end of the excavation had been found, and, as showing how we might

hold out against a considerable force for many days without fear of bodily suffering, Master Bartlett explained that it was his purpose, now we were all there to aid in the labor, to bring a number of large rocks in order to partially close up the mouth in such fashion that only one person could enter at a time. Therefore did it seem as if we would be more secure, in event of an attack, than if we were holding the best stockade that had ever been built in the valley.

Mistress Morley and Master Bartlett had made further plans for the bettering of this refuge as soon as there was time in which to do the work, and among other things it was decided that it might be possible to drill a hole through the side of the mountain into the cave, using a sharpened sapling as a drill, — in case there were no rocks to interfere, — and thereby an outlet for smoke could be had.

Both Giles March and I said all we could by way of encouraging the others in making the place more habitable, for after what had occurred since those hotheads at Forty Fort insisted upon doing exactly as John Butler would have them, it was more than reasonable to suppose this place would be their only shelter and refuge until the Tories and savages were minded to leave the valley. In other words, as we who knew the truth believed, many months must elapse before it would be safe for the women and children to venture out from the hiding-place.

Before the new day was an hour old, Daniel Hinchman came in with a goodly supply of game, which had been taken in the snares, and it goes without saying that he was feverishly impatient to learn how the battle had terminated, therefore, acting upon the advice of Stephen Morley that the truth should not be told in the presence of the women, Giles March and I led him a short distance up the mountainside, where we related the terrible story.

He was nearly overcome by astonishment and grief, and how could it be otherwise, for we had the same as told him that all his neighbors and friends, those whom he knew and loved, were dead, and yet, at that time we were ignorant of more than half the horrors which had come upon us of Wyoming since we, who had escaped from the retreat, entered the swamp to make our way alone.

"And now what is to be done?" Daniel Hinchman asked, helplessly, when we were come to an end of the dreadful recital. "Are we to stay here?"

"Where else, think you, will your sister be safe, unless peradventure you make the attempt to lead her across the mountains to the Delaware River?" Giles March asked, and I added:

"Even though it were probable she could withstand all the fatigue and hardships of a long, perilous journey, Daniel Hinchman, are you warranted in leaving the other women? Seeing that we are

come out, as if led by God, from all the horrors which have descended upon the valley, are we not bound together until such time as the entire party may go forth in peace, if, peradventure, that day shall ever come?"

"I am not minded to leave you, lads, because, save for your company of Minute Boys, Esther would yet be a prisoner among the Mohawks, if they had allowed her to live, and I, most like, be among those who are slain. I was only questioning if we were to make of yonder cave our dwelling?"

When we had come to this point in the conversation, Master Bartlett and Stephen Morley joined us, as if understanding that we were holding a consultation as to the future, and so did it become right speedily, for Master Morley took it upon himself to reply to Daniel's question.

"If Jonathan Ogden and Giles March have described to you one-half the horrors which we three have witnessed since yesterday's sun rose, then must you know that, until some great change can be effected, are we bound to remain here, where those whom we love are in reasonable safety, and it seems to me as if we could do no better than settle down with the idea of making this our abiding-place for a time."

"That is all which can be done," Master Bartlett added. "With so many hands, the labor of making the cave more habitable will be simple, and

it is not likely, unless we ourselves grow careless, that any of the enemy will come to suspect the whereabouts of our refuge."

"Of course we must know what may be going on in the valley," Giles March said, quickly, "and there should not be overmuch danger if one of us sets out very soon in gaining the information."

"I will be that one, and go to-night," Daniel Hinchman said, before it was possible for me to propose that I myself make the venture. "The canoe in which I came across the river is hidden snugly some distance from the water, and I alone can find it."

Master Bartlett nodded his head, as if to say that the proposition was one which should be entertained by us, and, therefore, without further words, was it settled that Daniel should go out at nightfall to learn what he might.

Such information as he brought back would determine our future movements, although we were well convinced that there could be no immediate change of location.

The women, together with those of us who were not wounded, spent the remainder of this day in working upon our underground dwelling, and many and great were the improvements we made.

Master Bartlett, with the assistance of Miles Parker, succeeded in drilling a hole for a chimney, as had been proposed, and Stephen Morley made a serviceable fireplace of rocks at the farther end

of the cave near the spring. The women, by weaving boughs together, succeeded in setting up something in the shape of a screen which shut off a small portion of the cave for their sleeping quarters, and, without very much disturbance of the foliage, we rolled two large boulders to the mouth of the cavern in such a manner as satisfied me that we could stand a long siege, however many might come against us.

As a matter of course, our food consisted of deer meat or birds, cooked without salt, and nothing more; but people who have been as near death as we had, and come off alive, are not warranted in complaining about the quality or the sameness of their provisions, provided there be sufficient to satisfy hunger.

To my mind God had been very good to us, — better far than our deserts, for He had led us through a Red Sea of blood to this refuge, and verily we had cause for most fervent thanksgiving.

It lacked but an hour of sunset when Daniel Hinchman announced that he was ready to set off on the scout, explaining that it was his purpose to start thus early in order that he might find the canoe before night had fully shut in, and when no one made protest at his going, for we all believed it necessary to learn of the situation of affairs, he said, quietly:

"I beg of you not to feel alarmed concerning me during eight and forty hours, for it is my purpose

to be absent that length of time. If I am not returned nearabout sunrise on the third day, then may you know I have come to grief."

"It is not well that you take overly many chances, lad," Master Bartlett said quickly. "Make your way to Forty Fort, and if you find there the enemy in possession, as doubtless you will, give it a wide berth. In some of the stockades should those who are yet alive be gathered, and once you have good assurance of coming upon a remnant of our people, don't make any effort at learning the whereabouts of the enemy, for we know full well they will be roaming up and down the valley, slaying and burning until those exceeding wise men in the Congress come to understand that something should be done for our relief."

Well, Daniel Hinchman went out as he planned, and during the eight and forty hours which he had set as the time of his absence, we worked at making our underground dwelling more habitable, being able to add to it much which, in the eyes of people not in such sore distress, would have seemed rude and uncouth, but to us were improvements and even luxuries.

Then came the time when Daniel Hinchman should return, and in our anxiety for his safety, those of us who were able to walk ventured a mile or more from the cave toward the river to hear the news which he might bring as speedily as possible; but he came not.

Only at noon did we give up all hope of him, and then, while inside the cave, we spoke cheeringly lest his sister should be overcome with grief, saying that doubtless he had found more of our friends alive than we expected, or was waiting to bring us a bigger budget of good tidings than could be gathered in a short while. Yet even as we spoke our hearts were like lead, and I dared not hold converse with my comrades concerning his fate, for it seemed all too certain he had but added another to the long list of victims which had been sacrificed to satisfy John Butler's love of cruelty.

That evening the two older men, with Giles March and me, went up the mountainside where we could talk without fear of being overheard, and discussed seriously whether it were well to send out another scout, for it seemed absolutely necessary we should know what was going on in the valley.

The discussion we had there was a long one, owing to the fact that both Giles March and myself were eager to be off, in the poor hope that there was yet time to be of service to Daniel Hinchman, while Master Bartlett and Stephen Morley insisted that we remain within our place of refuge six full days before making a move, the old man saying:

"It is only reasonable to suppose the savages are running riot through the valley, and our people have been slain or driven out to the last man, otherwise I am minded that Daniel Hinchman would not

have been taken, for he went with his eyes open, knowing all the dangers, therefore surely could have shunned them."

"Yet we *can't* sit here idle, Master Bartlett!" I cried, passionately. "It may be we are needed there, and it were cowardly to remain in hiding when we are able to lend aid to those who are so sorely pressed."

"How would you aid them, lad, if you crossed the river only to find yourselves in the hands of the savages? It would be as great an act of wicked folly for us to venture out now, knowing that John Butler's wolves are sweeping everything before them, as it was for those hotheads whom you and Stephen Morley strove against at Forty Fort. Content yourself, however hard it may be, with idleness until such time comes as you can be of real service, and I venture to say that, by saving your lives now, you will be of benefit to our neighbors and our friends — if any there be yet alive."

Well, it is not needed I should say that the counsels of the older men prevailed, for we lads would have been foolish indeed had we set ourselves up as being more wise in such a case, where they had had all too bitter an experience.

Yet when we laid down that night there was in my heart a feeling of shame that I remained there comfortable and apparently content, while there was so much of suffering and agony near at hand which I might relieve.

Esther Hinchman had not spoken above a dozen words during all that long, weary day, and although knowing full well she believed, and with good reason, that her brother was a prisoner in the hands of the savages, or had already been killed by them, we did not venture words of sympathy lest it should be seen by her that we feared the worst.

Then another day came, and we who were despairing and sorrowing became electrified, as it were, by hearing the cheery voice of Daniel Hinchman, as he hailed us from the thicket a short distance from the cave.

"He has come back!" Esther cried, in a fever of joy. "He whom I believed had been killed has come back!"

Then we who were burning to embrace the lad, who had seemingly come from out the jaws of death, held back that she might have the first privilege of greeting her brother whom she had mourned.

Daniel Hinchman's story was a long one, and when he came to an end of it, we had almost as good an idea of what had occurred in the valley since our flight as if we ourselves had taken part in all that was done.

Because each of us in turn interrupted the lad here or there in his story that we might ask for some unimportant details which he had neglected to mention, thereby prolonging the sad tale, I will make no attempt at setting it down as he related

it; but, rather, put in few words that account which is already a matter of history.

As we already knew, many of the fugitives from the field of battle fled to Monocasy Island, believing there to find a safe refuge; but Colonel Zebulon Butler's men told Daniel that fully an hundred Indians, and nearly as many Tories, hid themselves on the river banks until such of the fugitives as were aiming for the island gained that poor place of refuge, and then did they hunt them down like wild animals.

It was even said, and I have no question as to the truth because the man Pensil himself boasted of it, that he, who was a Tory and had joined John Butler's force, found his brother on the island and slew him, even while the poor man pleaded to his own flesh and blood for aid.

Daniel's voice trembled and his cheeks paled as he related the horrors which the savage horde boasted of as having taken place on Monocasy Island that night.

Colonel Zebulon Butler, with perhaps fifteen or twenty men, escaped to reach Wilkesbarre fort, and Colonel Dennison, accompanied by a small number, gained Forty Fort. Both these officers made preparations to defend the stockades so long as life lasted, knowing full well what would be in store if there was a surrender at that time.

When night was come, John Butler's wolves, red and white alike, assembled to dispose of their pris-

oners, and one has a feeling near akin to shame at setting down all that was done before the sun rose again. Captain Bidlack, who had led one of our companies in the battle and was wounded, was thrown alive upon the burning timbers of Wintermoot's Fort, and there held down with sticks and pitchforks until he was dead. Squads of prisoners were ranged in line, bound hand and foot, while their savage captors began with the first, deliberately murdering one after the other until the last had fallen. A half-breed woman, who was called Queen Esther, herself, with maul and tomahawk, butchered sixteen, who were forced to kneel around that boulder which in later days has been called "Queen Esther's rock."

I am minded to set down here that which was written afterward, by one who was a witness of the terrible scene in which the half-breed squaw supped on blood:

"The time was midnight, and the scene being lighted up by a large fire burning near, this Queen Esther appeared like a very fury from Hades while performing her bloody work. With the death of each victim her fury increased, and her song rose louder and clearer upon the midnight air. Leddeus Hammond and Joseph Eliot, seeing there was no hope, shook off the Indians who held them, and, with a desperate spring, fled to the thicket amid rifle-bullets and tomahawks that were sent after them, and escaped. This was not the only scene

of a similar kind that could have been witnessed between the ruins of Wintermoot's and the walls of Forty Fort."

Daniel told us that the only ray of light in this dreadful time to our people of the valley was just after sunset, when Captain John Franklin arrived at Forty Fort with a company of thirty-five men from Hunterdon and Salem, and before the sun had risen again, Colonel Zebulon Butler, with those who had taken refuge in Wilkesbarre Fort, joined the people, who were now beginning to hope.

Therefore it was that in all the valley, the only stockade remaining in the hands of our friends was this same Forty Fort. The stockades at Pittstown had long since been abandoned.

On the following morning, which was the day before Daniel had crossed the river on his scout, John Butler sent a messenger demanding the surrender of Forty Fort, and particularly of Colonel Zebulon Butler, with such of the Continental troops as he had with him, threatening in event of a refusal to comply, that an immediate attack would be made, and every one, including women and children, should be put to torture when taken.

Now it appears that there were only fifteen men belonging to the Continental army left alive, and knowing John Butler would, however many promises he might make, put to death all the soldiers that fell into his hands, Colonel Zebulon proposed that he and his followers should immediately leave

the valley before there was time for John Butler to set out in pursuit. Therefore, taking his wife behind him on a horse, the colonel rode through the woods that same day, intending to sleep at Conyngham in the Nescopeck Valley, twenty miles away. The soldiers followed on foot as best they might.

Then there remained only Colonel Dennison with some of the men from Hunterdon, the cripples and old men, the women and children, which had escaped the massacre, to be surrendered. And so he returned word to John Butler, understanding that there was no hope of making a successful resistance, and taking the chances that the Tory, who was more of a savage than the most benighted of his followers, would hold to the word which he should be called upon to give in writing. These terms, which Colonel Dennison himself drew up, were much as follows:

First, that the inhabitants of the valley should lay down their arms, and the garrison be destroyed. Again, that the people be allowed to occupy their farms peaceably, and the lives of all be preserved. Thirdly, that all stores supplied for the Continental army, wherever they might be hidden, should be delivered up as soon as possible, and that John Butler would use all his influence toward saving the private property of the inhabitants.

There was also inserted afterward, at the dictation of Butler, that such property as had been taken

from the people who were called Tories, at any time since the beginning of the war, be made good; that they should remain in peaceful possession of their farms, and be allowed to trade throughout the province without molestation.

Not to make too many words of the story, this surrender was effected late that same evening, which explains why Daniel Hinchman did not return as agreed upon, for he had succeeded in gaining entrance to Forty Fort, and was minded to remain until he could tell us all the tale, which would not be until he was able to see whether John Butler held faithfully to the terms of the surrender.

Here is an account as set down by Colonel Dennison himself:

"Everything being arranged, the two gates of the fort were thrown open that evening. The arms of the patriots were piled up in the centre, and the women and children retired within the huts that lined the interior of the stockade. At the appointed time the victors approached with drums beating and colors flying. They came in two columns, whites and Indians. The former were led by John Butler, who entered the north gate, and the latter by Queen Esther, the bloody priestess of the midnight sacrifice. She was followed by Giengwatah, who, with his warriors, entered the south gate. The wily chief, fearing treachery, glanced quickly to the right and left as he entered. The Tories, with their natural instinct for plunder, immediately seized the

piled arms. Butler ordered them to desist, and presented the muskets to the Indians. The inhabitants were then marked by the Indians with black paint on their faces, and ordered to carry a white cloth on a stick. These were objects, the savages said, which would ensure their protection."

Before morning came, so Daniel Hinchman told us, every dwelling in Wilkesbarre, and there were then twenty-three, was given over to the flames; but, so far as he could learn, no more blood had been shed.

Colonel Dennison and those men who had surrendered remained in the fort instead of seeking refuge elsewhere, in order that he might do what he could toward defending the women and children in case the savages proved too unruly for John Butler to control.

That was the story in substance, without going into the details, and it showed us that now indeed was the valley lost to us. John Butler had made arrangements for the Tories to remain in undisturbed possession, not only of such property as they then held, but all which had been taken from them shortly after the war began, and Wyoming was become a nest of loyalists who would do all they could to harrow, if not kill, those of us who had held to the American Cause.

The question which had come to us now in that cave of refuge, with the telling of Daniel Hinchman's story, was where we should go? Surely not

to our homes, for we had none; not again to the Susquehanna River, for of a verity would we be driven out if allowed to live, and until our wounded had recovered we were the same as prisoners in an underground dwelling, unless we were minded to play the part of savages and leave the helpless ones to their fate.

CHAPTER XI.

A COMRADE IN DISTRESS

BECAUSE of the questions regarding the future, which had come into my mind, I gave no heed to the fact that Daniel had not finished his recital, since the story had been concerning our unfortunate friends and neighbors, but never a word as to how he succeeded in returning to us.

It was Giles March who noticed the omission, and while my heart was filled with grief because of the fact that we were virtually prisoners in the cave, unable to raise our hands in defence of those who were needing help so sorely, he asked of Daniel:

"How is it that you were able to get away? Was your face painted black, and did you carry a white cloth on a stick, in order to show John Butler that you were one of those who pledged obedience to him?"

"I was neither painted black, nor did I carry the badge of disgrace," Daniel replied, curtly. "By moving here and there about the stockade, keeping as close to the ranks of the Tories as possible, I managed to avoid attracting very much attention, and when the surrender was fully effected I stole

quietly out, making my way down to the shore. And well it was that I did not linger, for before gaining this side of the river it was possible to see the flames shooting up from those houses which had been left standing near the fort, and I knew that, despite John Butler's promises, the Indians were continuing their work of destruction."

When Daniel had thus come to an end of his story, we sat silent and motionless, turning over in our minds that which he had told, and questioning whether there was any ray of hope in the future.

When perhaps five minutes had passed, I asked, looking at Master Bartlett:

"Is it in your mind that we are to stay in the cave until such time as it may be possible for us to go out in perfect safety, or might we try to play the part of men?"

"In what way, lad?" the old man asked in perplexity.

"It strikes me that such a party as we can muster might possibly effect very much in the way of holding John Butler's wolves to the strict letter of the surrender. We number six able-bodied men and lads. Why should we not go forth to do whatsoever we may for those who are in distress? The women need no assistance in caring for Samuel Rogers and Oscar Stephenson, and if we stay here, it is simply to suck our paws in the sun, like bears who have laid in sufficient of fat long before it is time to den up."

"If I knew what we might do, lad, an answer to your question could be better given. Tell us what may be in your mind."

"That we set out as soon as may be, not showing ourselves boldly to court an encounter with those who are stronger, but in the effort to give assistance where it may be needed. I dare venture to say work will be found for our hands, at the same time that we hold ourselves in prudence, remembering that those whom we leave behind us in the cave may have the first claim upon our services."

Instead of answering my question, Master Bartlett turned to Stephen Morley, as he asked:

"What think you of it? Soldiering has become your trade, and you should be able to give a better opinion than me."

"I believe the lad to be in the right," Stephen Morley replied, promptly. "It is true we can be of no service here after laying in a store of fuel. There are of provisions in the cave sufficient to fill all the stomachs in case we should remain away three weeks, and surely in that time we would rust out, if, indeed, there were no harm attached to our remaining idle when men are needed as they never were before."

"True for you, Master Morley!" Giles March cried, emphatically. "It would be a disgrace for us to linger here in idleness at such a time."

There was no need of further discussion; the

question had already been settled, and Master Bartlett gave good proof that he so considered it by saying, thoughtfully:

"We can't well set off before sunset or thereabouts, and until such time it seems necessary Daniel Hinchman should gain some rest, while we provide against the needs of the women and the wounded during our absence."

It was a most intense relief to have thus decided upon some plan which promised action, and, when we returned to the cave to tell the women what it was we proposed to do, never one of them raised a voice against our departure.

Mistress Morley, gathering her two children in her arms, said in a low tone as she caressed them:

"We could not ask father to stay, and it would be selfish in us if we did not bid him go."

Esther Hinchman spoke privately with her brother for a few moments, and then, coming up to me, said, as she laid her hand in mine:

"I'm glad you have decided to go, and shall pray that you may all be allowed to come back. There is no reason why you should have any anxiety concerning us, for here, if anywhere in the province, are we secure from intrusion."

Miles Parker showed plainly how well such a plan suited him, while the two wounded lads strove unsuccessfully to hide the sorrow which they felt at not being able to accompany us. Oscar Stephenson even went so far as to claim that it could

do him no harm to march in our company; but Mistress Morley very quickly put an end to his hopes by saying, emphatically, that he should not be allowed even so much as to stand on his feet until his wound gave better promise of healing.

Well, we did whatsoever we might around about the cave, and then, as Stephen Morley had said, those whom we would leave behind us were provided for in the way of necessities for at least three weeks.

The entrance to this dwelling in the mountainside had been, as I have already said, nearly closed by boulders, and there was enough of fuel inside to make as much of a fire as they would dare build, for it was not wise that too large an amount of smoke be allowed to escape, lest it attract attention from a distance. The water-supply was unfailing; the deer meat would be all the better for seasoning awhile, and in event of our being absent longer than we then counted on, that which was not eaten could readily be smoked.

We left behind us two muskets, with a goodly amount of ammunition, and, although two of our party would march forth unarmed, save as to their knives, we counted on being able to supply them with weapons before many days had passed.

Then came the time for us to set off, and I feared that the leave-taking would be painful; but it was Mistress Morley who spared us, by saying, as she held the two children up for her husband to kiss:

"It shall only be a God love you, Stephen, and not a good-by."

Then Giles March cried out cheerfully to the wounded:

"Take care of yourselves, lads, and get into condition as soon as possible. One or the other of us will be back every few days to know how you are progressing, and in a short time you will join us, for it is in my mind that the Minute Boys of the Wyoming Valley are far from being wiped out of existence."

Then we set our faces toward the river, marching rapidly in order to take advantage of the daylight which yet remained, and making no effort to hold converse one with another, for, although it was our desire to thus go out in the hope of being able to succor those who were in need, our hearts were heavy, as indeed they well might be.

We travelled light, carrying only so much of provisions as would allay the pangs of hunger during twenty-four hours, and therefore moved with reasonable rapidity, covering the five miles of distance before the sun had been out of sight an hour.

Daniel Hinchman went to where he had hidden the canoe, believing as did I that we would cross that same night, and two trips would be necessary, since the light craft could carry no more than four; but, before she was launched, Stephen Morley said:

"I see no good reason why we should push across the river yet awhile, for there is as much distress

this side as yonder. Let us make our way to the settlement of Wilkesbarre, and see what can be found."

"The dwellings were all burned, as I have told you, and we shall find nothing but ruins," Daniel replied.

"And it is among the ruins we should look for those whom we would aid," Stephen Morley said, curtly. "It must be there are some portions of the buildings yet remaining, however complete the work of destruction, and my proposition is that we search in turn each of the settlements, taking plenty of time for the work, because there is no reason why we try to cover any great extent of territory immediately."

Now it must be understood that we were come to the river between Fort Ogden and the stockade at Wilkesbarre, known as Wyoming Fort, therefore, in order to carry out Master Morley's suggestion, it was necessary we travel down-stream perhaps a mile and a half, and this required but a short time, since we were no longer traversing the wilderness, but a beaten road.

On arriving at the site of the settlement, we found that Daniel Hinchman had not drawn upon his imagination when he told us of its destruction. In the night the blackened ruins of the settlers' homes spoke more eloquently of the wilful havoc that had been wrought than if the sun was shining upon them, and as we went past this pile of yet

smouldering embers or the other, saying that here lived one friend and there that neighbor, our hearts heavy with grief, it was difficult indeed to repress audible evidences of our sorrow.

To me the strangest of it all was that we six had been permitted to pass through so much of danger, and yet come out unharmed.

It was necessary we go the entire length of what had been the settlement before arriving at the fort, and why Stephen Morley should have led us so far I could not understand. He had no real purpose in so doing, as I believed, for, when we were come within sight of the stockade, finding it untouched by the flames, he gave vent to an exclamation of astonishment, and Master Bartlett said, warningly, as he halted:

"Have a care, lads, lest we come suddenly upon too large a force of the enemy. It must be they have taken possession of the stockade, else why has it been spared?"

"I will make it my business to find out whether there be any of John Butler's crew in this vicinity," Giles March whispered hurriedly. "Wait you here until I come back."

We had halted near by the ruins of Phineas Barnes's dwelling, and there were yet enough of the timbers standing to make a fairly good hiding-place for us within the deep shadow. There we crouched until five minutes had passed, when we heard Giles crying:

"Come on, the stockade is deserted, and it strikes me we can find no better place in which to spend the night." –

I was vexed that he should think then of our own comfort, when we were come so near to where we might search out those who were, possibly, in direst distress; but, because the others obeyed his call, I could do no less, and we entered the stockade, finding it, I fancy, exactly as when Colonel Zebulon Butler and his soldiers abandoned it to go to Forty Fort.

As we passed through the main gates, which were standing open, Master Bartlett closed and barred them carefully, whereat I, remembering our experience in Fort Ogden, asked in a tone of irritation because of my nervousness:

"Is it well we should fasten ourselves in here, when for aught we know the enemy may be creeping up on us at this moment?" and he replied, grimly:

"If they are on our trail, lad, it strikes me we were better off with this gate closed than open. We are not now running from every one who has any connection with John Butler, as were you when you blundered into the Ogden stockade; but are out with the determination to hold our own when the forces are anywhere near equal. With the supply of ammunition which we have, it should be possible to make good our possession here for many

days, however large a crew might come against us."

"Ay, and be wofully hungry before the first four and twenty hours had gone by," I replied, vexed because he spoke so confidently, as if we might stand against any who were abroad in the valley thirsting for blood.

Not until the stockade had been closed as if we intended to make permanent quarters there, did Master Bartlett give token as to why he had entered, and then, mounting one of the platforms, he said:

"We should be able to get a good idea from here of what is being done on the other side of the river, and I propose that we stand guard to-night as if regularly stationed."

"Is that all we have come here for?" I asked, sharply.

"Nay, lad, it was in my mind, when we found this place untouched by fire, that, because it had been abandoned so hurriedly, we might find here some small store of provisions, or a secret hoard of ammunition. You who are acquainted with the fort should know all the likely places."

Upon this Giles March claimed to be as familiar with the interior of the stockade as he had been with his own home, and agreed to make diligent search if I would accompany him.

There were within the walls of this fort two blockhouses, and perhaps half a dozen small build-

ings intended for the use of the settlers at such times as they might be driven to take shelter in moments of danger, and I said to the lad as he entered the first dwelling:

"If it be in your mind to search all these houses, then we may as well understand that there is a long task before us."

"Now, Jonathan Ogden, have you grown almost as unreasonable as was I the first night we took possession of Fort Jenkins! If I was hot-headed then, what may you be counted now, who would push on at the best possible speed from one place to another, regardless of the fact that, if we are to find those who are in distress, it will be in hiding, and our work must of necessity be done slowly?"

Giles's words were sufficient to show me how childishly I was behaving, and without further remark I followed him from one building to another, while he made hurried search in such places as he knew things of value had formerly been kept, until we were come to a small structure of logs which had been put up for the shelter of horses or cattle, and, as he passed it, I said, laughingly:

"Since you are making so diligent a hunt, Giles March, I wonder you fail to enter this place," and he replied in a tone of good nature:

"Because we have nothing better to do just now, Jonathan Ogden, it seems to me you should be willing to spend your time uselessly, as it ap-

pears to you, for we shall come into places of danger soon enough to satisfy the most bloodthirsty."

He had no more than spoken, when from the interior of the shed came a low moan, and as we halted involuntarily, it was to hear the words:

"Is Jonathan Ogden there?"

Although not recognizing the voice, and having no idea in my mind that we might find a comrade there, on the instant it was borne in upon me that Elias Shendle was near at hand, and straightway I called his name.

Then it was we heard distinctly:

"I am here, Jonathan, which is not surprising; but how you have come, I fail to understand."

In a twinkling we entered the shed, where all was darkness save for the gray light which came through the doorway, but, peer into the gloom as we might, nothing could be seen.

Giles March walked entirely around the inside of the small building, and then, clutching me by the arm, whispered:

"It was the lad's ghost, Jonathan, for there is no one here."

I confess to being terrified, for it seemed as if Giles spoke truly; but, luckily, I plucked up sufficient courage to call:

"Elias! Elias! Where may you be?"

"Here! Here underneath the timbers of the wall, and so pinned down that I cannot get out unaided."

Even then we had difficulty to find where the voice came from. Not until we had crept across one end, searching with our hands for any excavation wherein a human being might be hidden, did we come upon the lad, and most grievous was his plight.

At the rear of the shed, where doubtless the horses had pawed away the earth, was a depression extending beneath the first tier of logs, and here my hands touched his garments.

"Be as careful as you may, Jonathan," he said, with a moan, "for I am well mangled by the bullets of the savages."

Without making too long a story, for it was nearly half an hour before we succeeded in getting our wounded comrade out from the narrow place into which he had crowded himself, and then only after having had the assistance of all the rest of our company, let it suffice to say that he had escaped from the fight at Jenkins's Fort, drifted down the river after stopping twice on the western shore, until come to this stockade, where he arrived in the night before Colonel Zebulon Butler's men had taken shelter there.

Finding the fort abandoned, he crept into the shed as the most likely place of concealment, believing the savages were close on his heels, and thinking they would search every other building rather than that. Coming upon the depression of which I have spoken, he had crawled into it, dug

away the earth with his hands while burrowing yet deeper, and gotten so far beneath the timbers that, owing to his wounds, he could not get back unaided.

When we had the poor lad where Stephen Morley and Master Bartlett could attend to his wounds, which they did without delay, Miles Parker, too eager for information to take heed of the fact that the lad was so nearly exhausted it was cruel to force him into conversation, asked why he had not come out when Colonel Zebulon and his men were there.

"I heard them when they entered," Elias said, striving manfully against the pain in order to make the explanation. "I knew who they were, and, finding it impossible, because of this mangled arm, to get out of the hole, I cried again and again for help; but they, most like, remained in the blockhouse nearest the main gate and heard me not, or, if my voice did reach their ears, it alarmed them, even as Jonathan and Giles were frightened. My efforts to attract their attention must have thrown me into a delirium, for I became unconscious during a time, and, when my senses returned, the yells and cries of Indians could be heard on every hand."

"That was when they were destroying the settlement," Giles March said half to himself, and Elias continued:

"So I believed at the time, and felt certain the stockade would be given over to the flames, when

I must be burned to death. Then it was that I contrived to get my knife from the belt and turn its point against my heart, that I might drive it in rather than suffer a painful death. But the moments passed without bringing further harm until it was as if the savages had departed, since which time I have been like one in a frightful dream, knowing well my condition at times, and again overcome by fever, as it were."

"I reckon it can do you no good to tell overly long stories just now," Master Bartlett interrupted. "We shall have plenty of time to hear the tale when you are mended somewhat."

"The wonder of it is that he did not starve," I said in a low tone to the old man, thinking that the greatest kindness we could do him would be to satisfy the pangs of hunger, and he, hearing my words, replied:

"When I came through the settlement on the night of the battle, the people had just abandoned their dwellings, and, as I ran, I found near half a loaf of corn bread which had been dropped by some of the fugitives. It is water I need, although while coming down the river it seemed as if I could never be thirsty again, so much was I forced to drink in."

Giles March had hastened toward the spring inside the enclosure when Elias first spoke of his thirst, and we soon gave him as much clear water as seemed safe at one time.

Then, the wounds being bandaged rudely, I took Master Bartlett aside and asked him if, in his belief, they were dangerous.

"I am not overly much of a surgeon, Jonathan, but it looks to me as if the lad was badly hurt. One leg and an arm are useless, bearing no less than three wounds, and he has what appears to be a knife-thrust in his right side. If he was at the cave, where the women could care for him, there might be some chance for his life; but, as it is, I believe we have only come in time to ease his meeting with death."

Then it was as if I forgot my impatience to be out in the valley, searching here and there for sufferers, and had in mind only the plight of my comrade. If it was possible his life could be saved by taking him to the cave, then would I carry Elias Shendle on my back the entire distance, begrudging not the labor if he might be spared one single pang; but when I gave words to that thought, Master Bartlett said, gravely:

"I question, lad, if he would live to get there. The journey could not be otherwise than long and rough, and he holds on to his life, as it seems to me, but by a thread. The wonder of it is that he had sufficient strength remaining to cry out when you and Giles were near him."

"But we must do something for him, Master Bartlett."

"Ay, lad, so we have to the best of our abil-

ity, and will do as much more as is within our power."

Then came the thought that, if we could not carry Elias to the cave, we must be held there in the stockade as prisoners, for verily I would not leave him, even though I was forced to stand against all John Butler's wolves until they had overcome me.

Elias Shendle was the dearest comrade I ever had, and whatsoever of distress or danger there might be abroad was as nothing compared with the duty I owed him, for I knew full well he could never be frightened or coaxed from my side if I was needing his assistance.

It was a black perplexity. We who had come out on a definite enterprise, knowing that it might be possible for us to aid very many, would be held here by one, unless those who had come with me minded to act contrary to my wishes.

While I had been talking with the old man, Elias sank into a sort of stupor, which was not unlike death itself; but Stephen Morley, who claimed, and with good reason, to have more experience in such matters than either of us, stated as his belief that the lad was suffering more just then from exhaustion than from his wounds, and declared positively that, now he was in comparative safety, it would be possible for him to sleep, which was the best medicine that could come to him.

"We will make up such a bed as is within our

power, here in the open, rather than inflict pain by moving him into one of the blockhouses, and he shall be left in quietude until morning, after which I am looking for so much of an improvement as will make it seem as if he was on the road to recovery."

I could have kissed the old soldier, who gave me such relief of mind, and, after we had made Elias as comfortable as we might with the poor materials at our hands for a bed, I took Giles March one side, explaining to him all which I have set down here, whereupon the lad said manfully, and as a comrade should:

"You may count on me, Jonathan Ogden, to go as far in behalf of Elias Shendle as you would. If it be necessary, we two will stay here by him; but I am thinking, because of what Stephen Morley has said, that we may rig up with saplings what will serve as a litter, so that he can be carried to the cave without too much of jolting. We are warranted, I believe, in taking more than ordinary risks in moving him, since it seems certain he will die here, where at any moment the enemy may come upon us."

CHAPTER XII.

SAVING ELIAS

BECAUSE Master Bartlett had said that sleep was the best medicine our wounded comrade could have, Giles March and I remained at a distance, but yet where it was possible to keep him in view, while the others had taken up their stations near that blockhouse which stood at the southwestern corner of the stockade.

Now and then we conversed in whispers, careful lest we disturb the lad, who appeared to be resting comfortably, and laid our plans for the morrow, when we were determined, as I have already said, to carry Elias Shendle to the cave.

It seemed probable we would be able to do this and return to the fort within four or five hours, since the journey was to be made during the day, and I said to myself that we were fully warranted in thus spending the time which could have been employed in looking for others, for here was one whose life might be saved. Even though he had not been a dear friend, I argued that it would be criminal in us to pass him by on the chance of finding others.

Now and then we two lads slumbered a few moments, for the soughing of the wind through the trees, the darkness, and the myriad of night noises, all tended to render our eyelids heavy. Sleep did not come, however, with such effect as to render us unconscious of any unusual sound, and when, perhaps half an hour before daybreak, the noise of rapid footsteps coming across the enclosure was heard, I sprang to my feet, knowing there must be some good reason for such rapid approach.

It was Daniel Hinchman who came up, but before he could speak I placed my hand over his mouth, in token that Elias might be disturbed by the sound of voices, and then led him a short distance from the building, to hear the message which he brought.

"Master Bartlett has sent me to say that we have good reason for believing a party of the enemy is coming this way from the direction of Fort Ogden, and one of you lads is to join him at the blockhouse."

Without thinking I might be detained many moments, and also fancying, in my stupidity, that it was a false alarm, I ran back and repeated in Giles March's ear that which Daniel had said, adding on my own account:

"Do you remain with Elias, and as soon as may be I will come back to let you know what is in the wind."

Then I followed Daniel, and we had hardly more

than joined the others when all doubts as to the cause of the alarm were set at rest, for the voices of Indians could be plainly heard.

"After having destroyed the settlement, what may they be coming for now?" I whispered, not intending to ask a question; but Stephen Morley heard the words, and replied, grimly:

"It has most like entered their minds that this stockade was left standing, and now they have returned to complete the work of destruction. We are like to have trouble, for even though I may be at fault as to the reason of their coming, it is not likely the villains will pass by the fort without trying to have a look at the inside."

I had left my musket just inside the blockhouse, with the weapons belonging to the other members of the party, and this I took up, making certain it was loaded and primed, but forgetting in the excitement that I should have hastened back to tell Giles March of what had been said.

The savages were coming straight toward the fort, talking now and then among themselves as if suspicious that there might be in the vicinity white people whom they could butcher, and our little company stood just behind the main gates, where had been made loopholes for the use of the defenders.

"Are we to open fire immediately they come in view?" I whispered to Master Bartlett, and he replied:

"That is for you to say, Jonathan Ogden. We yet count this the company of Minute Boys who defended Fort Jenkins, and Stephen Morley and myself are two privates under your command."

"Nay, nay, Master Bartlett, do not jest at such a time as this," I said irritably. "It is for you and Stephen Morley to say what should be done, even though we had a full company here."

"Then it is to my mind, lad, that when the villains are come close to the gates we shall open fire, taking good care each bullet counts, for it will avail us nothing to give them an opportunity to decide how we may be attacked. In fact, we are not in position to stand a long battle, because of the probability that there may be many others of their kind in the vicinity."

Then it was we understood, by the sound of the voices, that the newcomers had halted a short distance away, and I was on the point of clambering up to the sentry's platform in the hope of seeing what might have stopped them, when suddenly there rang out on the night air a woman's voice, shrill and full of agony.

At that cry, which came to our ears like an appeal for help which could not be disregarded, Master Bartlett forgot entirely that he claimed to be only a private under my command, and said sharply, as he began to unbar the gates:

"Stand ready, lads! They have found some poor creature who had been hiding in the ruins

of her own home, perchance, and we will take a hand in the matter whatever may be the result."

One of the big gates had been swung open wide enough to admit of our passing out, before the old man ceased speaking, and I was the first to go through the opening, showing how illy fitted I was to command even this remnant of a company of Minute Boys, since I forgot entirely our wounded comrade and he who watched by his side.

It was Stephen Morley who halted me by placing his hand on my shoulder, as he whispered:

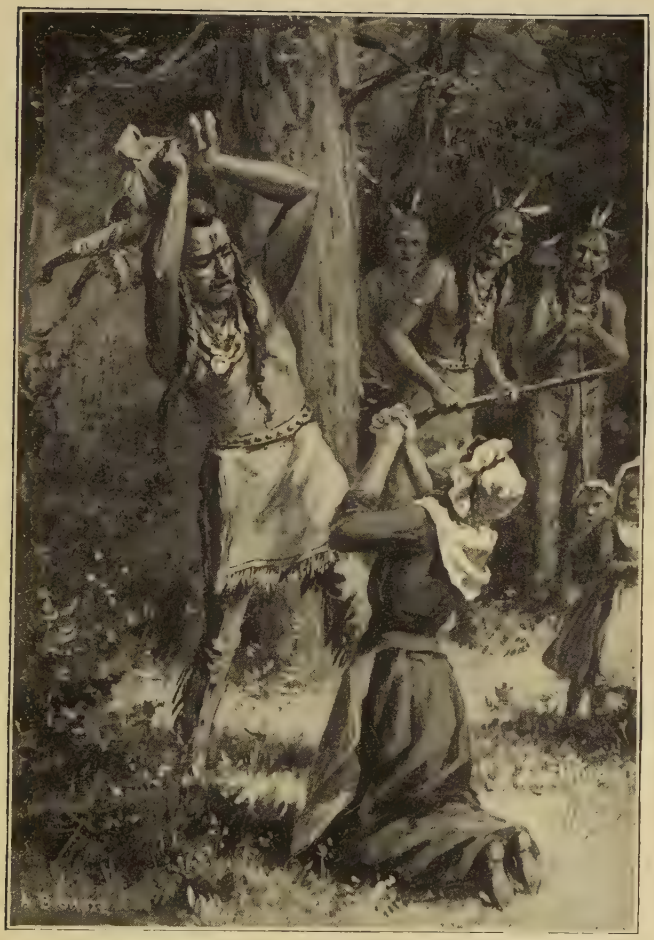
"One moment, lad, until Simon Bartlett has decided who shall remain to hold the stockade," and then I remembered my neglect, turning on the instant to make amends by going back, when Master Bartlett, having thrust Miles Parker aside, said to him:

"Bar the gate after we are on the outside, and await some signal from us before you open it again."

Then he pressed forward upon my heels, and I could not have delayed if I would.

Again came that cry of agony, and I could think only of the poor creature in such sore straits; but yet had sufficient sense to understand that we must go out under some leadership, rather than helter-skelter like a flock of sheep.

"Lead on, Stephen Morley, and I will bring up the rear," Master Bartlett said, and thus were our preparations made.



"ONE OF WHOM A PAINTED BRUTE HELD HIGH IN HIS HAND."

There was no need to search for the foe; the savages were laughing and chattering like a lot of baboons, so that even in the darkest night might we have gone directly toward them without making any mistake, and since Stephen Morley continued on around the stockade, keeping close within the denser shadows of the walls, we came so near to the red wolves that it seemed almost as if I could have thrust out my hand and touched the nearest without leaving my tracks.

They numbered, I judged in the first hurried glance, not less than ten or twelve, and were clustered around a woman, who was kneeling on the ground before them begging for mercy, and three children, one of whom a painted brute held high in his hand, as if to dash it to the ground.

I saw Stephen Morley level his musket, and knew full well what target he aimed at, therefore did I follow his example, save that I counted to send my bullet into the heart of the wretch who stood nearest the woman.

There was no need that we await the word of command. As if our little party had been standing shoulder to shoulder, and could understand by the sense of touch what was being done, our muskets were discharged in a volley that rang out as one report.

Four of the savages fell, and it was as if they had hardly reached the ground before we were upon the others, striking with our clubbed muskets

right and left, knowing that upon the swiftness of our movements depended the life of this poor woman and her children, for they would have plunged their weapons into the helpless ones before turning to meet us had we given them time.

It was the suddenness of our first attack, and the quickness with which we followed it up, that prevented them from making any attempt at fighting, more particularly since they were all ignorant as to how much of a force had fallen upon them.

In a twinkling those who were left alive turned and fled like the curs that they were, leaving behind them five of their number, while it is safe to promise that more than one of those who ran carried with them bullets that had been moulded by the women of Wyoming Valley.

"Pick up the youngsters and make for the fort," Master Bartlett said, sharply, seizing the arm of the woman, who yet remained on her knees as if paralyzed with fear, and I venture to say that one could not have counted sixty from the time we left the stockade until we were inside it once more and the gates barred, with the woman and her three children in safety.

"Why did you beat a retreat when we were having the best of it?" I asked of Master Bartlett, feeling aggrieved because he had turned tail when there was a possibility, as it seemed to me, of inflicting further injury upon the enemy.

"Because it stands us in hand to keep them in

ignorance of our numbers," he replied. "If, peradventure, they have learned how weak a force we are, then can we count on seeing not only those who have retreated, but an hundred others, mayhap, in front of this stockade by sunrise."

This he said to me hurriedly, and literally shouldered me aside as he spoke, that he might look in the face of the woman whom we had saved.

"This is Mrs. Stockbridge, if I'm not mistaken," the old man said, taking the yet terrified woman by the arm. "What were you doing here, mistress, that you failed to join the others in their flight?"

"It is Master Bartlett!" she cried in a frenzy of joy, as she seized the old man's hand. "Thank God you were come in time to save my little ones!"

"But what have you been doing here so long?" the old man asked, sharply.

"When the others fled I was left behind because of trying to save some little things for the children, and on coming out of the house found myself alone in the settlement."

"And then?" Master Bartlett cried. "And then why did you not go?"

"Because I dared not!" she wailed. "It seemed as if we were entirely surrounded by the savages, and, not being able to carry all three of the children, I knew it was impossible they could keep pace with me in the rapid flight."

"But when the savages burned this settlement?" Stephen Morley asked, and of a verity it did seem

a miracle that this woman should have been alive, amid the ruins of her house, in which hardly four of the timbers were unconsumed.

"On finding ourselves alone, deserted, as it were, I went into the cellar with the children, and there, in the casks which had been sunken that we might make saltpetre, I took refuge, not knowing when the building was fired."

"And you lived while your home burned above your heads?" Stephen Morley demanded, but it was a useless question since there stood the woman before him.

"Yes, by the goodness of God. Because we had been working so lately with the lye, and in order to get the water from the outside had brought it in a stream across what remained of the floor, such timbers as I could pile above us were sodden; they protected us even against the heat of the burning house."

"And have you been there ever since?" I asked in astonishment, saying to myself that it was little more surprising she and her children had lived in that narrow hiding-place so long than that the poor protection had saved them from the fire.

"I gathered up food when we made ready for the flight, and therefore had plenty with which to feed the babies, while one of the casks was filled with clear water, therefore, save for being in such narrow quarters, we suffered no harm."

"And how was it the savages discovered you

at this time?" some one asked, and then we learned that it was through us the poor woman had ventured out at the very moment when danger lurked close at hand.

It seemed that she had heard our voices when we came through the settlement, and only waited to make certain we were not pursuers. Leaving the children in the place of concealment, she had come out a few moments before, listening at the gate of the stockade until satisfying herself who was inside. Then returning, and taking the children with her, started for the fort just as John Butler's butchers arrived.

"It was well we decided to leave the cave," Master Bartlett said as if speaking to himself. "Not yet twelve hours since we set out, and here are four lives saved. What may we not do later?" Then, in a louder tone, he added, turning to me, "Our work is cut for us, lad; it lies here and there among the ruins of the different settlements, rather than in any fortified place."

While he was speaking to me Mistress Stockbridge had been kissing and fondling her children as if after a long time of separation, and I could well understand she believed, in her ignorance, that after all the horrors of the past few days was she come unto deliverance, whereas she stood, perhaps, in more danger than while among the lye-casks under the ruins of her home.

"Is there any good reason why we should stand

here chattering like a party of old women?" Stephen Morley asked impatiently, and I, surprised at his tone, turned upon him with the question:

"What would you have us do?"

"Anything rather than remain here. Is it in your mind that those savages whom we sprang upon so suddenly are yet running? Even though there was nothing else to call them back, they would strive to save the scalps of their friends whom we have killed, as you should know from what has been done in the past. It is time we were making a move."

"True for you, Stephen Morley," Master Bartlett said, heartily. "I was near to forgetting myself, in the joy of knowing we had been allowed to save this poor woman and her children from the knives of those fiends."

"But where are we to go?" I asked, helplessly, thus showing how little I knew concerning the work in which I embarked when joining the Minute Boys.

"It matters little, so that we be not here when those whom we attacked return, as return they will very shortly."

Then it was that I bethought me now had come the time when no complaint could be made against the plan which Giles March and I had formed of carrying Elias Shendle to the cave, and I said, beginning to speak even as Giles himself came across the enclosure to learn the cause of the firing:

"You can't go far, or make any very desperate fight while Mistress Stockbridge and her children are of the party, neither am I willing that we desert Elias Shendle while he is unable to raise a hand in his own defence."

"Well, lad?" Master Bartlett said, impatiently, knowing most like I had some plan to propose.

"It is in this way, as Giles March and I have figured it: We two can carry Elias Shendle to the cave, returning here within five hours, if so be we travel in the light, and day is now close at hand. Why is it not an act of prudence to take the poor lad to our refuge, and with him these four who have just been rescued?"

"It is what should be done," Master Bartlett said decidedly, and much to my surprise, for I had fancied he might take stand against the proposal. "If we are to accomplish anything more, we cannot be hampered by such helpless ones as these," and he pointed toward the children. "We will all go back with you a mile, perhaps, and then, returning, so cover the trail that the savages may not be able to follow it."

For the first time since we had found that place of safety on the mountainside, did I realize how simple a matter it might be for those human bloodhounds to track us out, for we had journeyed back and forth without giving heed to our footsteps.

It sounds strange that a lad living in such times, and accustomed to a life of danger, himself trail-

ing man and beast when the necessity arose, should have forgotten entirely how easy it would be for the enemy to come upon that refuge which we had, in our heedlessness, believed no foe could find.

However, that wasn't the time to consider such a matter. Our helpless ones were there, and must remain for a certain number of days at all events. We could only hope that they might be able to defend themselves, should need arise. At present, it was for us to pursue the plans we had formed and already begun.

As soon as Master Bartlett had fallen in so completely with the proposition made by me, Giles March and I set about making a litter, which consisted of two saplings bound together by vines, interwoven so closely as to form a rude bed on which the sufferer could lie.

Because in this work all assisted, we were ready in less than ten minutes from the time of the rescue to set out, and then the grayish hue of the eastern sky was telling of the day to come. Giles March and I stripped off our hunting-shirts, laying them across the saplings in order to render the rude litter a trifle more comfortable to the poor lad, and when we lifted him upon this rough couch he opened his eyes, looking at us in a manner which told he understood what we were doing.

"It is to carry you back among the mountains, dear lad," I said to him as I laid both our muskets by his side. "There will be found those who can

care for you better than we, and you will be safe from the fiends who have worked so much of misery upon us."

"Death is very near to me, Jonathan Ogden," he whispered, "and it seems better you should strive to aid those who have more of life remaining in them."

"We shall so patch you up, Elias Shendle, that within two weeks' time you will be begging to go out with us, when we show to John Butler that his hand is not so mighty as the happenings of the past two or three days have led him to believe," Giles March said, cheerily.

Then, taking up the handles of the litter, we set off, Mistress Stockbridge walking by Elias's side, where she might be able to minister to his wants, and the children following close behind.

After them marched the remainder of the party, and as we went out through the gates of the stockade the day was so nearly come that it was possible to see our way through the thicket with reasonable clearness.

Thus did we take up the line of march, silently, for the children, young though they were, realized, after their past terrible experience, how necessary it was they should hold their peace. We were returning to that little refuge in the mountainside where the helpless ones might be left, as we believed, in safety.

Once well clear of the fort Master Bartlett halted us, saying, as he did so:

"In order that you two lads may be the fresher for the task yet before you when we have gone as far as seems best, let Miles Parker and Daniel Hinchman carry the litter."

It was a heavy burden over that rough way, but yet we would not have complained, however severe the labor. When, however, Master Bartlett himself made this suggestion, it seemed to me a good one, since by acting upon it we could advance just so much the more rapidly.

After this change had been made we went on hurriedly, for there was no telling how soon those painted curs would be at our heels, and when we had covered a mile or more in distance, again the old man called a halt.

"Now has come the time when we shall turn back, Jonathan Ogden. Instead of making any further effort to go up the valley, we will wait somewhere between here and the stockade for your coming, unless, peradventure, those savages who left us so suddenly should come back in the meanwhile with reinforcements, and we be obliged to shift quarters. Do not delay any longer than may be necessary, but on approaching the settlement again, take ample time to move warily, for I warn you that the danger will be great."

This was our leave-taking, and my heart was light when Giles March and I continued on, bearing

Elias Shendle between us, with Mistress Stockbridge and the children following close at hand, for there was no question in my mind but that within five hours, at the very longest, we would again be with those whom we called comrades.

More than once before we arrived at the cave was it necessary for Giles and me to set down the burden in order to relieve our aching arms; but I promise you that the halts were no longer than seemed absolutely necessary, for we had good reason to make the utmost speed.

It can well be supposed that Mistress Morley and Esther Hinchman were surprised when, while yet a short distance from the cave, we cried out to them that we were returning, lest they should be alarmed at hearing footsteps, and then, as they came to know what we had already succeeded in doing, their joy can be perhaps faintly imagined.

It seemed to me that more than once during the journey had Elias slumbered or lapsed into unconsciousness, but when we took him into the cave where he was greeted by Samuel Rogers and Oscar Stephenson — when he saw what seemed to be a place of refuge from all the horrors which had surrounded him, his face lighted up with sudden joy, and I fancied that the belief he had escaped from his enemies was already doing much toward his recovery.

We made up another bed of twigs and leaves, where the lad could lie between his two wounded

comrades, and, having made him thus comfortable, were ready to depart. Mistress Stockbridge and the children seemed wondrously contented — almost happy, if any one could have been happy in Wyoming Valley at that time, and were settled down as if at home.

It seemed necessary we should delay our departure sufficiently long to tell Esther Hinchman of all that had happened since our starting out, and when the story was come to an end she said, as if a premonition of what was to follow overshadowed her:

"Why do you lads go back so soon? If it be that the remainder of the company are to stay in hiding until nightfall, you had best stop here a while longer."

"But they will be looking for us, and, if we fail to show ourselves at the time set, might come to see what had happened," I said, laughingly.

Then we two, Giles March and I, went out, leaving the girl standing at the entrance of the cave watching with wistful eyes, as if fearing lest something terrible was about to overtake us.

With the feeling that the Minute Boys of Wyoming Valley were accomplishing something of good, even though their numbers had been so sadly lessened, we lads walked on without thought of taking heed as to silence. A sense of security was upon us while we were so near the eastern mountains, but before we had travelled no more than

half a mile Giles March, who was in the advance, stopped suddenly, stepping backward until he was pressed close against me.

Even then there was no suspicion in my mind that he might have seen one of the savages, and, thinking a bear or some other animal was within easy musket-shot, I looked in the direction he was gazing.

Then it was as if my heart stood still and the blood in my veins grew chill, for I saw amid the green leaves, hardly twenty paces away, a half-naked savage coming toward us, stooping, with his eyes fastened upon the ground as if he was following the trail.

There was no time then to speculate as to why the villain had come, nor how he could have followed our tracks without meeting the remainder of the party. The traces upon the leaves and earth would lead him directly to the cave and, however many might be behind, it was our duty to cut him short in the chase.

The same thought must have been in Giles's mind, for before I could raise my musket he fired. The Indian stopped suddenly, half-raised himself, and then wheeled about, being lost to view amid the foliage in an instant.

We two stood staring at each other in fear and amazement, knowing beyond a peradventure that the discovery of our refuge by the enemy was close at hand, for even though this cur did not live to

join his fellows, they would soon come upon his trail and then follow ours.

Thus it was that all suddenly and without warning, our cave, wherein the helpless ones sought safety, was become the most dangerous spot that could be found, and I grew sick with fear and indecision, not knowing whether it was our duty to stay and defend the place which would likely soon be assaulted, or first speed on to tell Master Bartlett and his company of the disaster which seemed so near at hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

DEFENDING THE CAVE

THAT which seemed to me at the moment most important was whether Giles's shot had been a fatal one, or, if he had wounded that bloodhound, who, most like by accident, had come upon our trail, and the question shaped itself into words.

"There is yet life enough remaining in him, judging by the way in which he turned, to admit of his giving the alarm, unless his companions are too far away," Giles replied, and continued in a tone of grief: "Why did I not shoot with surer aim? Why have we allowed the murdering villain to escape?"

"It is of little moment, Giles March, whether he lived or died," I said, soothingly, and the lad looked at me in surprise, whereupon I hastened to add: "When he failed to return to his fellows, they would most likely set out in search of him, and, coming upon the trail, not only follow it to where his body might be lying, but to our cave."

"What shall we do?" Giles asked, helplessly, and I was unable to answer the question promptly.

"It seems to me as necessary Master Bartlett and his party be warned, as that we return to guard

the cave," I said, half to myself. "Help me to decide whether we shall go back simply to give the alarm, then striving to reach those who are waiting for us by the river, or if we ought to remain at the cave."

"To my mind we have little need for raising such a question," Giles said, promptly. "When we fail to return, our comrades must understand that something of serious import has detained us, and will be on the alert for danger from this direction. There are none in the cave to defend it, save the women, for those crippled lads would make a poor showing in trying to handle a weapon. We must go back, and without delay."

Even while recognizing the truth of Giles's words, I was in doubt as to which party of our friends stood more in need of aid just then. That the women could stand off the savages for a time seemed certain, and I knew only too well that the little company of Minute Boys, being all unsuspicious of danger from the rear, might easily be overwhelmed.

Yet when Giles wheeled about, marching resolutely up the mountain, I followed, and neither of us spoke until Esther Hinchman, hearing our footsteps, crept cautiously out to see who might be approaching.

The quick-eyed girl could readily see by our faces that something in the nature of a disaster had prevented the continuance of the journey, and coming

yet farther from the cave, as if fearing lest those within should be unduly alarmed, she asked, in a whisper:

"What is it?"

I could not bring myself to tell her that even at the moment, when she fancied herself in comparative security, John Butler's wolves were on the trail, and hesitated and stammered until Giles March cut me short by saying:

"We met one of the savages on the trail not far from here, but succeeded only in wounding him. He was following us, and there is good reason for believing more than he may come very shortly."

I had looked to see Esther Hinchman overcome with alarm and grief, but to my surprise she bore herself as bravely as her brother could have done, asking sharply:

"How long a time, think you, before they can get here?"

"As to that, we have ample opportunity for making such further preparations for defence as may be needed," I replied, able now to speak with her concerning the danger, since she seemed prepared to meet it. "Surely a full half-hour must pass before that cur can gather force enough to come upon us, — he hasn't the courage to follow the trail farther alone, even though he may have the ability."

"What ought we to do in the way of making ready for them?" she asked, and I said, as I be-

lieved, that there was nothing further which could be done with profit, save it might be to roll the boulders a trifle closer together, and even while speaking I questioned if that would be advisable, since in the fight, which was almost certain to come sooner or later, it might be necessary for one or more of us to leave the cave secretly and quickly.

"The others must be told," she said, turning to run on in advance.

Giles and I lingered that we might not witness the first outburst of grief in which we believed the women would indulge.

When, five minutes later, we entered the cave, it could plainly be seen by the expression on the faces of Mistress Morley, Mistress Stockbridge and the others that the worst was known; but yet I could see no evidences of terror. The poor people had passed through so much that was horrible during the last eight and forty hours that it was no longer possible to cause them further alarm.

Elias Shendle beckoned feebly to me with his uninjured hand, and, dropping on my knee beside him, I whispered:

"What is it, lad?"

"Did you see more than one of the savages?" he asked.

"No, no, Elias; Esther has told you all the truth. There was but one, and he followed our trail, therefore do we know that others will come shortly."

"Unless it should be that Master Bartlett and the lads, seeing them, and having suspicions of their intent, do something toward stopping the curs," he whispered, and then it was that for the first time I saw somewhat of hope in the situation. There yet seemed a possibility that the attack which I had reckoned on so confidently might not be made.

"There are two of us wounded lads here who should be of some service in defending the place," Oscar Stephenson said. "I can make my way to the entrance unaided, and, if Samuel Rogers and Elias Shendle were carried forward where it would be possible to see out, why might not they be able to discharge a musket with reasonably good effect?"

"There are as many of us here uninjured as can fight with advantage," I replied, quickly. "The entrance is so narrow that more than two would choke it, and, with the women to load the guns, I see no reason why Giles and I should not be able to do as much execution as could half a dozen who would be forced to fall back after firing, that others might take their places."

There is no good reason why I should set down all that was said during the first few moments after coming back with such woful tidings. When it was decided that Giles and I alone would face the enemy, and we took our places with all the muskets in the cave loaded and lying ready at hand, everything possible had been done.

It only remained for the savages to open the battle, and I counted that, because of the screen of bushes directly in front of the aperture, the foremost of those who came on the trail would show themselves fair targets for us before understanding they were at the end of the journey, therefore, as I said to Giles, were we likely to cut down a couple before they could fire a shot.

"It is not well that we talk one with the other, save in whispers," Giles said, after we had taken our stations behind the boulders which partially blocked the entrance, "else by so doing we give the savages token as to where we are."

On the instant a profound silence reigned, and I could understand that the wounded lads and anxious women must be suffering mentally, for the waiting was like unto that which a soldier experiences while standing in line of battle listening for the word to begin his work.

The suspense was terrible as we watched eagerly for the first movement of the bushes which should tell of the approach of the enemy, straining our ears for the lightest unusual sound, and when it seemed as if a full hour had passed since we heard even a whisper from our companions, there came a rustling at the farther end of the cave, which, because of the stillness, startled me.

Looking around, I saw that Mistress Morley and Mistress Stockbridge were dragging the wounded lads yet farther into the cavern, where

they might the better be sheltered from a stray bullet, and heard Elias Shendle say, hoarsely:

"It is the children who should be thus protected; not we lads, who are of no good either to ourselves or our friends."

I was yet watching the movements of these brave-hearted women, when Giles discharged his weapon, and, turning suddenly, I saw lying almost directly in front of the opening the half-naked body of a dead Indian.

The savages had come, but in what number it was impossible even to guess, and now was the time at hand when the lives of all within our place of refuge depended upon the watchfulness of Giles and myself.

"How many did you see?" I asked, and he replied as he took up a loaded musket, pushing his empty one back that it might be recharged by Mistress Morley:

"Only one, and it is not certain but that he may be the same at whom I fired before."

Then it was that I searched with my eyes every inch of that dusky form which could be seen lying so hideously still in front of us, hoping to find there the trace of a second bullet, but seeing none. Then came the disheartening realization that, when the day was done and darkness covered everything as with a veil, we could not prevent the red wolves from creeping up until, sheltered by the same

boulders behind which we lay, they might shoot into the cave.

I should have grown even more timorous than I was had I not shaken off such forebodings resolutely, and given myself wholly up to the task of watching for a target.

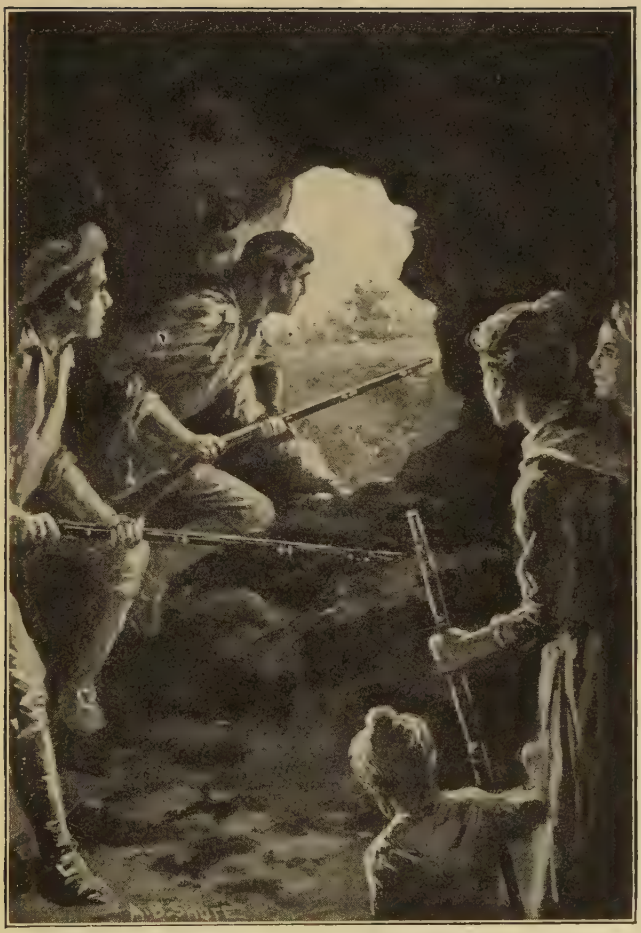
So profound was the silence that when Mistress Morley, having loaded the weapon Giles had discharged, pushed it forward toward us, I started like one in fear, and was near to trembling so violently that she might have seen it.

Not a sound from the outside broke the silence; nothing betokened the probable fact that the bloodthirsty enemy, perhaps in large numbers, were crouching within a few paces, hoping to kill, and a stranger who could have looked in on us then would have questioned why we two lads were lying there behind the rocks watching so intently through the narrow aperture.

I believe ten minutes had passed in this distressing suspense, when Giles whispered, cautiously:

"It is ten times worse than a battle, lying here where nothing can be seen, until one's eyes become so tired that he fancies this bush or that is suddenly turned into one of John Butler's demons."

I would have made reply in much the same strain, but at that moment the leaves to the right of our trail were moved aside in a direction contrary to the breeze which was blowing, and then I saw



"TAKING STEADY AIM . . . I PULLED THE TRIGGER."

two fierce, eager eyes peering out from amid the leafy screen of green.

Taking steady aim, my hands as firm now as though they had never trembled with suspense, I pulled the trigger. Following the report came a sound like unto the falling of a heavy body, and, regardless of the necessity that we remain silent, I said, exultantly, to Giles March:

"That is the second viper we have wiped out!"

It was like a tonic to me, being able to do some execution, and I found it difficult to restrain myself from rushing forth boldly, so eager was I to put an end to this skulking method of warfare.

Again Mistress Morley performed her work, and I took up a loaded musket.

"We are equal to twenty of them at this rate, for, with three women to load the weapons, surely we will be able to fire as fast as they can give us the opportunity," I whispered to Giles, and he nodded without speaking, much as to say that I was forgetting prudence because of the blood-fever which had come upon me.

Another long time of anxious waiting, and then I felt a hand upon my shoulder, when, turning quickly, I saw Esther Hinchman crouching close behind me.

"What is it?" I asked, nervously, and she replied:

"Nothing, save that I wanted you and Giles March to know we were ready to do whatsoever

lay in our power, and await the time when we may be needed."

"That I knew before, dear girl," I said, feeling wondrously heartened because of the words, and a sensation near akin to jealousy came into my heart when I saw her go over to Giles March to give him cheer also, as if I alone had the right to hear such words from her.

That my comrade's courage was strengthened by Esther's coming, if, indeed, it had needed strengthening, I knew when he whispered to me:

"Go back and speak with the lads. They must be in sore need of cheering, and I can do all that is called for here."

There was really no good reason why two of us should remain on guard while the Indians remained so well concealed, not daring to rush the place, and I acted on his suggestion, kneeling beside Elias Shendle a moment later, to say:

"Everything is well with us, lad, and I believe we may be able to hold off such force as is concealed near by, until Master Bartlett and those with him shall come to learn why we failed to join them."

"Can you get any idea how many there are in front of the cave?" Elias asked, and I told him what had been done — that we had succeeded thus far in killing the only two who had, as I believed, gotten a view of the entrance to our retreat.

"I wish I might take a hand in the matter, in-

stead of being thus worse than useless," he said, and pressing his hand, I replied, warmly:

"You are far from being useless yet awhile, Elias Shendle. Do your best at getting on your feet once more, and thus will you hearten us all. I am yet looking to see the time when our company of Minute Boys, or as many as are alive, will be able to do their full share toward driving from the valley those who are even now ravaging it."

"All that might have been done already, Jonathan Ogden, if I, and such as I, had not been a hindrance. If the savages had killed us outright then you would not be wasting your time here defending us."

"Nay, lad, you are wrong in that, since whether you were alive or dead should we be held here because of the women and children. I count that we Minute Boys are doing full service when we save the lives of as many as are here in this cave, and that I warrant you we shall do, however hotly those who are lurking outside may press us, for we hold the advantage to such an extent that an hundred of them could never gain an entrance while two of us are able to discharge the muskets which the women can load."

Then I went in turn to each of the other lads, whispering such words of comfort as came most readily to my tongue, and returned to my place by Giles March's side, feeling as never before the im-

portance of holding myself well together in order to cheer those who were depending upon us.

Later Esther Hinchman brought us dried meat, and water in a vessel of birch bark, which she had deftly fastened together with thorns, and we made what served us well for a meal, watching keenly as we ate.

Then, in turn, Giles went back to speak with our wounded comrades, leaving me alone on guard, and in this wise did time pass until evening came, without our having again seen anything at which we should shoot.

Just at twilight, when we might distinguish the bushes in front of us and yet not be able to see clearly, that happened which robbed me of my sense of security.

The children had laid down to sleep, their mothers sitting beside them to check any cry of alarm which might come if one of the muskets was discharged suddenly, when I heard distinctly the dropping of a pebble, evidently from that portion of the cave where Master Bartlett had formed the narrow chimney by thrusting down through the earth a sharpened sapling.

Giles's head came up on the instant, and I knew he had heard the same. It seemed like a matter of small moment to thus arouse two who were defending the lives of so many; but we had learned to distrust the lightest unusual sound, knowing that

it betokened some new danger, although for the instant it was impossible to say what.

Then, suddenly, the reason for the dropping of that pebble came to me. Touching Giles ever so lightly, that he should understand I had left him, I stole softly back to the fireplace, and, as I looked up through the aperture, a few tiny particles of earth struck my face.

Then was it all plain.

The Indians, despairing of being able to dislodge us by direct assault, except at too great a cost, had been prowling about searching for some other entrance to our place of refuge, and their keen sense of smell had detected the odor of smoke near by that small hole.

Hurriedly I asked myself what it might be possible for them to do, and began to realize that, unless the earth contained as many rocks as would serve to form a roof sufficiently strong to uphold the soil, then might they without danger to themselves so loosen the whole as to bury us completely.

If Master Bartlett had been able to force a sapling through the earth without meeting any obstruction, then was it likely that the same might be done in other places, and half a dozen of such holes would be sufficient to bring down the mass upon us, when the weight of a dozen or more savages was put upon it.

In a twinkling I could see that we might all be killed without a shot having been fired, and the

danger was one against which we could not guard and yet hold ourselves covered.

Going back hurriedly to Giles March, I would have told him that which I had learned, but he checked me by saying:

"I can understand it all, lad, and there is no reason for words. They are above the fireplace."

"Yes; I felt the soft earth as it fell."

"And they may work there, for all I can see, until the task is finished," he said, and to this I made no reply, for verily none was needed.

Then, while one might have counted twenty, we two remained silent, after which he whispered, drawing closer to me lest our companions might hear:

"Oscar Stephenson is less sorely wounded than either of the others. He can, by resting his musket against one of the boulders, be depended on to take my place here."

"Where would you go, Giles March?" I asked, yet at the same time knowing full well what was in his mind.

"Outside. In less than half an hour it will be possible to move about among the trees, because of the darkness, as well as can the Indians, and with no more danger than they will be running."

"But you are like to come upon them unawares."

"Ay, but so are they like to come upon me, and he who is least surprised will get the best of the battle."

"But what if you should be worsted?"

"You who remain here would be in no greater danger, and there is a chance that I may be able to put an end to that work above the fireplace."

"You shall go, Giles March," I said after a moment's thought. "I believe you are warranted in doing so, for before morning, unless they are turned from the effort, will we be buried alive."

"Then you are to stay here on guard with Oscar," he whispered, groping about for his powder-horn, and I replied in a tone of one who is not disposed to argue the matter:

"You and I go together, Giles March. Mistress Morley can do as good work here as either of us, and she, with Oscar, will be able to defend the entrance."

He would have remonstrated, despite my manner of speaking, but that I cut him short by saying:

"It is no longer a question of what we *would* do, Giles March, but of what we *must*. With you to make your way up the mountainside at the left, and me on the right, we stand a chance of being able one to aid the other in case of a hand-to-hand fight, and I am of the opinion that two are needed, therefore it only remains to tell the others what we propose to do."

"Then do you go back and prepare them for the change, while I remain here, and because it is necessary we go at once, try to find my powder-horn.

It should have been near here; but likely Mistress Morley used it when she loaded the muskets."

I did as he bade me, summoning the women to where our wounded lads could hear what was said, for I was not minded to go over the plan more than once, because of my desire to get at work as soon as possible.

As I expected, much opposition was made, particularly by Mistress Stockbridge, who claimed that if we two lads, the only able-bodied male members of the party, went out, then would their doom be certain; but I cut her short by saying:

"If we remain then is there no hope that a single one of us will be alive when the sun rises again. It wasn't to discuss the matter that I came back here, but to tell you what was to be done. Mistress Morley and Oscar Stephenson will take our places at the entrance. Mistress Stockbridge will, if it shall be necessary, reload their weapons, and thus the defence may be continued the same as if Giles March and I remained."

"I wish I might be with you," Elias Shendle said, faintly, and although we were going into direst danger, I pitied the dear lad because he was forced to remain inactive at a time when he knew, as did all the others, that every hand which could be raised in our behalf was needed.

It was Esther Hinchman who brought the pow-

der-horns when I asked for them, and whispered softly as she put them in my hands:

"May God go with you, and send you back unharmed!"

I think it was some such words as those which I needed just at that time, for until she spoke there was a chill at my heart because of believing the time to be so near at hand when we must lead these defenceless ones out to meet the bloodthirsty wolves, unless we were willing they should die from suffocation beneath the roof of their refuge, and I said to her that which at the moment I firmly believed.

"He must send us back that we may be able to take you out from this place of danger."

She and I helped Oscar Stephenson out to the entrance, Mistress Morley following, and as we came up Giles March arose to his feet.

I gave him the powder-horn, swung mine over my shoulder, made certain of having a handful of bullets in my pocket, and we two stood listening intently to make certain that the time was ripe for us to begin the hazardous venture.

Night had fully come. In the forest, as we were, it was impossible to see half a dozen paces in advance, and because of the trees were there no shadows to be cast, therefore it was necessary only to guard against making a noise. It can well be imagined that we moved stealthily while coming out from between the boulders, he going to one

side and I to the other, the friendly night swallowing us up almost immediately.

So far as the whereabouts of the Indians were concerned, we knew only that one or more of them must be directly above the cave over the fireplace, and it was reasonable to suppose there were others here or there guarding against a surprise. To avoid those who were acting as sentinels was the most difficult portion of our task.

I made a wide détour, counting to ascend the mountain fifteen or twenty yards above where I believed the enemy were, and then coming down upon them from that direction in which they would least expect any interference, knowing full well that in order to make even such a journey an hour or more would be required, because my advance was necessarily so slow that I hardly took a single pace in a full minute.

It was as if the forest was untenanted save by the beasts and birds whom God had placed there; I heard no sound, saw nothing betokening danger, until I was come forty paces or more from the starting-point, and then, so suddenly that I was literally stupefied by bewilderment, did two sinewy hands clutch my throat, bending me backward and yet further backward as if to crush my bones.

Cry out I could not, because of that steel-like grasp upon my throat, and even though I had been able to call for help I would not, since by so doing

it would have brought Giles March straight to his death; for I knew all too well that he would never pass unheeded an appeal from me, however great the danger which menaced him.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNEXPECTED AID

I WAS well-nigh powerless in the grasp of the brawny savage, and, although nearly suffocated, there came into my mind the question as to how long I could stand the strain which he was putting upon me.

Each second were my senses growing more and more dim, and yet I wondered whether I might live one minute or two, for it was a settled fact in my mind that death had then come, and there was no power which could be summoned to my aid to hold it back.

Fortunately for me, although as a matter of course I did not understand it at the time, this human wolf of John Butler's was as eager to keep the silence as I, for, not knowing how many of us might have come out of the cave, he naturally supposed I had at my back a sufficient force to meet those who were working on the mountainside above, and to his mind an alarm would be the same as turning the tables upon them.

My brain was in a whirl. It seemed as if I could see a dozen hideous faces swaying round and round

in a circle before me; sparks of fire danced before my eyes, and in another instant I would have been sent out of this world beyond a peradventure.

All this I realized despite the mental confusion caused by the suffocation, and then suddenly I felt the fingers relax. I staggered back against a tree, and when my adversary sank slowly to his knees, and then downward until he lay prone upon the earth, falling in a heap as does one who has been killed while standing, I believed it was all a trick of the imagination — that while I was passing into the Beyond this picture, and this belief that I was no longer being choked, was but a fancy born of death.

Then while I swayed to and fro, striving to collect my scattered senses, a voice whispered in my ear as a hand was passed over my face:

"Did he wound you, or are you only half-choked?"

"A good bit more than *half*-choked," I replied, now beginning to understand that I had to do with a friend, and yet bewildered because one had appeared so unexpectedly. "Is it you, Giles March?"

I bent down as I spoke, and to my utter amazement did I see Esther Hinchman standing before me. She it was who had stricken down the savage when he was so near to making an end of me, and I believe the astonishment caused by such fact

was greater than the bewilderment from which I suffered while nearly suffocated.

"How did you come here?" I asked, regardless of the fact that it was dangerous even to whisper in that place, which we knew must be peopled with our enemies.

"I followed you out from the cave, fearing lest something of this sort might happen, and knowing that you and Giles March were to separate."

"But how was it that Mistress Morley so nearly lost her head as to allow you to come?" I continued, and she replied in a whisper light as the morning breeze:

"There was no reason why I should stay. I could be of no assistance in the cave, and here I was needed, as it so chanced. Is it in your mind, Jonathan Ogden, that we girls of Wyoming Valley should have no part in this desperate struggle, or do you believe we ought to sit with folded arms, while our fathers and our brothers sacrifice their lives in our behalf?"

It was folly for me to remain in that place talking with the girl, when duty demanded that I ascend the mountain at as nearly an equal pace with Giles March as might be possible, and, besides, it was dangerous to indulge in conversation.

Therefore it was that, taking her by the arm lest we be separated in the darkness, I led her by my side, continuing the advance as stealthily as was in my power, and she knew enough of woodcraft

to be able to make her way through the undergrowth with no more of noise than might have been caused by a falling leaf.

Never before had I admired one of my race as I have since that moment! It was all so strange to me that this young girl could come out and do the work of a man, and such work! She had saved my life, and while climbing up the mountainside, feeling the way inch by inch lest I set my foot upon a dry twig which would give the alarm, I resolved that all my life long would I endeavor to repay her for that which she had done.

When we came to a spot where the trees grew less dense, I noted that she carried a musket as well as a knife, and had slung over her shoulder a powder-horn. She had made ready for the kind of work which might be found to her hand, and had shown more of wisdom than Giles March and I put together, for neither of us, in making our plans, had fancied that we would come upon such an encounter as had just been mine.

We continued on up the mountainside until having, as I judged, arrived at a point opposite where Master Bartlett had made the aperture in the earth to serve us as chimney, and then struck off at right angles, moving even more slowly than ever because of knowing that when we were come near to our destination we would be in the very thick of those painted fiends who were striving to compass the death of the women and little children in the cave.

Until we were, according to my belief, almost directly over the cavern, no sign of the enemy had been seen, save when the fellow who was now lifeless had seized me; but as we halted, straining our eyes to peer through the gloom which so nearly concealed surrounding objects, it was possible to see four or five dark forms clustered within a circle not more than ten feet in diameter.

By this time I recovered the wits which had been nearly choked out of me, and believed Giles March was gazing upon the same scene presented to Esther Hinchman and me, awaiting some movement on my part. As I figured to myself, he was nearly opposite where we stood, not very far away, and if we opened fire it would be necessary to avoid shooting in his direction.

It was only needed I should touch Esther Hinchman lightly on the arm, for her to understand that which was in my mind as clearly as if I gave the thoughts words, and then we circled around the crouching savages until believing we were come upon them directly from the rear.

Raising my musket, I called her attention by gestures to what I was about to do, and she at the same time took aim.

I counted that Giles March, hearing the report of our weapons, would fire almost immediately, and unless two of us had singled out as a target the same Indian, then we might count on disposing of three at the first volley.

When I fired, Esther Hinchman's shot followed as if it was but an echo of mine, and before a quick-tongued lad could have counted three came the report of a musket from where I believed Giles March had stationed himself.

We could do no more, for like startled deer two of the savages sprang forward into the thicket, and the crashing of the branches as they ran in terror, regardless of their footsteps, told that they had gone down the mountainside.

Before it was possible for me to leap forward in order to learn what execution had been done, two reports rang out seemingly from beneath our very feet, and then did I know that Oscar Stephenson and Mistress Morley had caught a glimpse of the fugitives sufficient to warrant them in shooting.

An instant later Giles March and I came together as we approached the place where the Indians had been at work, and there saw two of the fellows who would give us no further trouble, while it was also possible that those in the cave had succeeded in inflicting some injury upon the curs who ran so swiftly.

"There could have been but few of them here," Giles said, after making certain those of our enemies who remained above the cavern were dead, "for unless my eyes deceived me, there were only four in the party."

"Five," I said, "for Esther Hinchman killed

one who was nigh to making an end of me not forty paces from here."

"Esther Hinchman!" Giles March cried in astonishment, and as he spoke the girl stood before him.

He looked at her in open-mouthed astonishment, and despite the dangers and horrors of the situation I could find food for mirth in his bewilderment. The lad's surprise was so great that it seemed absolutely necessary we should gratify his curiosity at once, and in a few words I told him of what had happened, thereby causing him to seize her hands as he cried, heeding not the fact that open speech might imperil our lives:

"You are a comrade worth having, and if Jonathan Ogden and I had known of what stuff you are made, I question whether we would have believed it necessary to stay in the cave instead of rejoining Master Bartlett and the remainder of the party."

It was neither the time nor the place for us to indulge in compliments or much conversation, and I gave my companions to understand such fact, while I began looking about to see what the Indians had succeeded in doing.

From the evidences of their work it was plain to be seen that they understood full well how we might be disposed of without danger to themselves. Although having nothing but sharpened saplings with which to dig, they had furrowed up the

ground in a spot ten to twelve feet square, until fifteen inches or more of the surface had been removed. But for the interruption, it seemed certain they would have succeeded in their purpose within another hour.

"Keep moving roundabout here, Esther Hinchman, while Giles March and I shall have put back this earth so far as we may, for as matters look, it would not require any very heavy weight to throw down the roof of the cave upon those who are inside."

She went on guard as I had suggested, and then it was that Giles March proposed we cut down a dozen or more saplings, laying them in the excavation to form a sort of network which would further protect the roof of our place of refuge, which was now all too insecure, and after this had been done we pushed back as best we might the soil that had been removed.

We must have spent not less than half an hour in this labor, and all the while did Esther Hinchman flit here and there through the thicket to make certain there were none of the savages creeping up on us, after which we went back to relieve the anxiety of those who could not fail to be wondering why we lingered so long after having discharged our weapons.

Not until giving due warning of our coming did we venture to present ourselves in front of the opening, because in the darkness those who were

on guard might well have shot us down for the enemy, and once inside the wounded lads as well as the women insisted on knowing what had taken place, for, as I suspected, they had been filled with keenest fear lest we had come to some harm.

I took it upon myself to tell the tale while Mistress Morley and Oscar Stephenson yet remained on duty at the entrance, and it was my desire to do so in order to give full meed of praise to Esther Hinchman, because, except for her courage and quick wit that night, had I been lying on the mountainside stark and cold as was the fiend whom she had sent out of the world.

"There is no longer a chimney to our refuge," I said, having come to an end of my story, "and perchance the time is near at hand when we should make a change of quarters, for I question whether John Butler's braves will not come back in strong force, believing there are enough of us here to afford them pleasing amusement in the way of torture."

"Shall we go out now?" Mistress Morley asked, as if speaking of making a pleasant jaunt from one dwelling to another, and I replied with a laugh, for my heart was strangely light, having come back to life as it seemed I had:

"I wouldn't care to undertake a journey through the thicket in the darkness, howsoever great might be the peril which threatened, and even when the sun shall rise to-morrow, I am of the belief that either

Giles March or I should seek out the remainder of our company before making any change, lest we lose them in the wilderness."

Esther Hinchman was not disposed to set herself up as a heroine, and as soon as we were inside the cave, even while I was telling the story of what she had done, the dear girl went from one to the other of the wounded lads, striving to give them more of comfort or relief.

As was but natural, we speculated upon the probable force of the party which had come so near compassing our death, and only then did I remember that Oscar Stephenson and Mistress Morley had fired at the fugitives.

"My bullet went wide of its mark, I feel certain," Oscar said in reply to my question. "I fired at what was hardly more than a shadow; but Mistress Morley believes hers sped with truer aim, and I am counting, if there be not a dead Indian on the trail a short distance in front of us, one grievously wounded is trying to make his way to the river."

Giles March would have gone out to learn what he could, but that I insisted on his remaining, for the price he might be called upon to pay would be too great simply for the satisfying of our curiosity.

Well, of what we said that night among ourselves I could write many pages; but they would be entertaining only to those who took part in the

conversation, therefore is it enough if I say that we kept vigilant watch throughout all the long hours of darkness.

After a new day was come, rendering it possible to see each other's faces, I fancied that all the wounded lads were in better condition than they had been four and twenty hours previous, while each of our small party wore a look of hopefulness, in vivid contrast with the despair that had been written on the features when first arriving at that place of refuge.

Giles March and I had long since taken the places of Oscar Stephenson and Mistress Morley at the entrance, and after meat, which had been cooked the day previous, and water was brought to us that we might at least go through the form of eating breakfast, Giles asked of me:

"Which shall it be, Jonathan Ogden, you or me?"

"What mean you?" I inquired in perplexity.

"Was it not in your mind last night that one of us would go to meet the others of our company?"

I made no reply for the moment; that which a short time previous had seemed the proper thing to do now looked much like foolhardiness. During the night I had persuaded myself that the savages could not come upon us in any force within six and thirty hours at the most, because of the fact that they must necessarily be scattered all over the valley in their work of butchery, and I had more desire to

linger there on the chance of our friends coming to learn of our fate than of dividing the force.

I gave words to much of that which was in my mind; but Giles March would not be convinced it was the part of wisdom for us thus to delay, and I argued the matter at considerable length until, while we were yet talking incautiously loud, the sound of footsteps could be heard but a short distance in front of us.

On the instant we were on the alert and ready for what had a ring of danger in it, and then came a low call like the note of a catbird, whereupon I ran out quickly, knowing that Master Bartlett was near at hand.

What a relief it was when I saw all of our friends had returned, and the look of anxiety, which had not yet passed from their faces, told how disturbed in mind they had been regarding our safety.

"You have had a tussle with the savages," Master Bartlett said, hurriedly, as I advanced to meet him.

"How know you that?"

"There is a dead one on the trail a short distance below here."

"Ay, Mistress Morley was right; she gave him more lead than he could carry, and now may we count that only one of that villainous gang escaped."

As a matter of course, it was necessary I ex-

plain the meaning of my words to those who gathered around me, and, when I was come to an end of the story, Stephen Morley and Master Bartlett appeared to be more concerned in mind than before.

"What is it?" I asked, thinking, mayhap, they had brought news of worse disaster.

"Enough, to my thinking," Stephen Morley replied, grimly. "You believe one of the red wolves escaped, and we may be certain that he will bring back a crowd to smoke you out of the cave. There are not so many victims to be had in the valley now that they can afford to let slip our party, and the question is, what shall be done, Simon Bartlett?"

While the two men were discussing the matter, I asked Daniel Hinchman to tell me what he and his companions had done since Giles March and I left them.

"Very little," he replied, "save to learn that Colonel Dennison and some of our friends yet remain in Forty Fort. John Butler is trying to keep the word which he gave when they surrendered; but his red butchers are not inclined to be kept in leading-strings while there is yet blood to be spilled, therefore do those under Dennison fear to go out lest they be massacred, for they are the same as without weapons."

"And the Indians themselves?" I asked. "Do they remain near the fort?"

"Only so many of them as John Butler's Tories can hold there by force. So nearly as we could

learn they are divided in parties of from twenty-five to fifty, travelling to and fro, destroying such dwellings as first were spared the flames, because of being at too great a distance from the stockade."

"And how many settlers yet remain alive?" I asked.

"That cannot be said by me or any other. There are many who have fled; women and children have gone on foot across the mountains, or down the river, trusting to rafts or even single logs, and yet scores upon scores of them are fallen under the tomahawk of the savages or the bullets of the Tories, for it is difficult to say whether the red man or the white is inclined to show the least mercy."

"And you found no others who might be aided?"

"None. All that has been done by us, in addition to gaining the information I have just given you, was a brush with half a dozen whom we met near by Fort Ogden, and to those we gave such a taste of our metal that they will never again follow any other so-called leaders who come from Johnson's Hall. If we had fifty lads or men, Jonathan Ogden, we would drive those human wolves to take shelter in the stockade at Forty Fort, and hold them there. Now has come the time when we may take revenge, and I pray that my life be spared long enough to shoot down as many as I believe I should claim as my share."

"But we can't roam here or there over the valley," I said, after a pause, and he replied, bitterly:

"True, and the reason is that some of us must be left to protect those who cannot care for themselves. If Stephen Morley and Master Bartlett would decide that the women and children should undertake the journey over the mountains, then might we be left free-handed to do as is our duty."

"But you forget the wounded, Daniel; they may not be moved yet awhile."

"You are right, Jonathan, and thus are we hampered," Daniel replied, and then he went up the trail toward the cave to greet his sister, who stood a short distance away waiting for him impatiently.

When next I joined the two men it was to find them at loggerheads. Stephen Morley was of the belief that we might take the three injured lads, the women and the children, into the stockade at Wyoming, leaving them there to protect themselves, while we went out to harry the smaller bands of savages who were roaming to and fro, even as they had harried our people.

On the other hand, Master Bartlett insisted that we remain in the cave during at least eight and forty hours, claiming that there we could defend ourselves the better, and when I asked why he would delay that length of time, he replied that it would give at least two of the wounded chance to recover sufficiently to move through the forest unaided.

"But then where will you go, Master Bartlett?" I asked.

"By that time we shall know better where we are most needed."

"How?" Stephen Morley demanded.

"By going out again. I will take Jonathan Ogden and Giles March, agreeing to return here within eight and forty hours, and promise you that while absent we will give good account of ourselves."

"But why not take all the able-bodied of our force?"

"Because now is it certain the cave will be again attacked, and there must be enough left here to guard it."

Then once more the two men fell into a discussion as to the best course, and, burning with the desire to do something other than remain on the mountainside in idleness, I cut short the arguments by saying:

"Stephen Morley is bound to stay here because in his wife and children he has more at stake than any other. Do you select the force you desire, Master Bartlett, and let us set off without delay."

Master Morley went into the cave as if disgruntled; but, as I looked at the matter, it was not a time when we were bound to consider one man's ideas as against the many, and once more I urged Master Bartlett to do as I had suggested.

The result of the matter was that within half

an hour we three, the old man, Giles, and I, were ready to depart, and those of our comrades who were to be left behind had sorrowful faces, as if, because of being forced to remain in a place of comparative safety, they were in some way being deprived of their rights.

We would have gone without speaking even to the wounded, but that, just as Master Bartlett took up his musket to set off, Esther Hinchman came toward me, and I was only too glad to meet her.

"You will remember, Jonathan Ogden, that while there are helpless ones left here on the mountainside your life belongs to them. Daniel has told me how eager you are to be off in the aiding of those who may be suffering. He believes, and so does Master Morley, that your efforts will be vain, because there are none left alive needing assistance, therefore I know full well you will have an encounter with the savages."

"Ay, that is what we hope for. There is a price which they must pay in blood for what has been done, and until the debt is collected I am hoping no man or lad who once called our valley his home may be willing to remain idle."

"But you will remember that there is a debt which you owe us who are here."

"Meaning that I shall lag behind when there is work to be done?" I said with a laugh, and she replied, taking my hand with a caressing gesture which pleased me wondrously:

"Not so, Jonathan Ogden, for even though you promised it, I would not believe you could keep such word. I am not asking you to stay here, but that you remember those whom you leave behind."

CHAPTER XV.

A FORTUNATE FIND

It heartened me more than I can tell to know that Esther Hinchman had singled me out to say that which she did. If she had spoken to Giles as well as me, then would I have known beyond question that her anxiety was concerning all who might be needed to defend the cave; but she had picked me from the others, and, without being able to say exactly why, I rejoiced thereat.

Turning my head just before passing the fringe of bushes which concealed the entrance to our place of refuge, I saw that she was looking after me, and I waved my hand, wishing most fervently it was possible to put into words the thoughts which were in my heart.

Until we had travelled two miles or more, no word was spoken between us who had set off on a scout with the hope of finding some of our neighbors and friends whose lives might yet be saved, and then it was that Master Bartlett came to a halt.

"Why do you stop this side of the river?" I asked, impatiently, for I was burning as never before with the desire to accomplish that which would

prove to Esther Hinchman I was a lad only in years, that I might be depended upon to perform a man's work.

"Because it is well we understand exactly why we have come," Master Bartlett replied in a tone which provoked my curiosity, and Giles March said, sharply:

"I thought that much was already agreed upon; surely we made talk enough concerning it before setting out."

"Ay, lad, what we would have the others believe was well threshed out; but at the time there was another idea in my mind which seemed of more importance, although I could not give it words lest all the able-bodied of our company insisted on holding with us."

"Do not be so mysterious," and Giles spoke in a tone of irritation, "but let us know what you are driving at."

"So you shall, lad; it was for that purpose I halted," the old man said, deliberately, as if to weigh well his words before uttering them. "To begin with, we are all agreed that, as soon as the savage who has learned the secret of our hiding-place can tell his fellows what he knows, a large force will be sent to smoke us out. Now it is certain that, in case an attack is made upon the cave, but few of those on the inside can do anything against them, since, fortunately, the entrance is so narrow."

"No more than two can work to advantage there," I interrupted, "and, with two others to reload the weapons, the place cannot be taken from the front, save by a determined rush, when the first six who presented themselves would surely be killed."

"Ay, and because of that same condition of affairs have we come out as if on a scout. I am satisfied there are none in the valley at this time whom we could aid, therefore our only show of accomplishing anything would be to lie in wait for small parties of the red fiends and wipe them out."

"And is that what you count on doing?" Giles March asked, impatiently.

"No, lad, because I do not believe we would be warranted in that kind of fighting so long as we have with us the women and children. I was eager we three should come out, to the end that we might lie in wait nearabout until the enemy arrives, and it would go hard if, taking them in the rear after an attack on the cave was begun, we could not give the murderers a lesson such as they would not soon forget. If we had said as much before starting, it would have been hard work to keep the others back."

The old man's plan was a good one, and I could readily understand that we might be able to do much execution when the time came; yet, because of what Esther Hinchman had said, I would have

been better pleased to roam up and down the valley, in the hope of accomplishing something which might convince her I was able to do a man's work.

Giles March, however, was not willing to remain inactive as long as might be necessary in order to carry out what Master Bartlett had planned, arguing that it was not reasonable to suppose the savages could or would be likely to arrive before the day was spent and another nearly ended.

"I agree that you have hit upon the proper trick to put a speedy end to any attack that may be made; but, if that was all we were to do, it would have been better that we remained in the cave with our friends at least until to-morrow noon," he said, quickly. "Since we have come away, and to the end that we may not be forced to stay here sucking our thumbs, let us keep on to the river, having a good look at all the ruins, with the chance of finding some one who has been hidden as was Mistress Stockbridge."

I added my voice to this proposition, since it seemed the true one, and we started off once more with the agreement that, at the end of four and twenty hours, we would return to go on watch.

Our faces were turned toward the river, and we made no other halt until having arrived at the bank of the stream, when we moved more cautiously, lest we attract the attention of those of the enemy who might be on the opposite side.

Nothing could be seen to cause alarm, and we set

about searching such ruins as lay to the south of where we then were.

Even as we began the task I understood that it was too much to expect we could find another family who had remained securely hidden, as had Mistress Stockbridge and her children; but, nevertheless, we did our work thoroughly and without interruption until nearly nightfall.

There was sufficient evidence of butchery and destruction on every hand to make our hearts ache, but we found no one alive; and, when the sun was near to setting, Giles March claimed that there was no reason why we should not be able to learn of what might be going on near Forty Fort if we were willing to spend the hours of darkness scouting in that direction.

To this Master Bartlett made no protest, although I could understand full well that it caused him pain to walk so far and so long.

"We should be able to find a canoe somewhere along the bank near these ruins," I said to the old man, because it was quite a serious matter for him to go into the water when he could not swim a stroke, and immediately I began to search.

It was only reasonable to suppose that those of the settlers who had more boats than were needed to take them across the river when they fled to Forty Fort would have concealed the remainder in the bushes near the water, and, because of such reckoning, I clambered down the bank to the very

edge of the stream, peering in at every likely spot.

On arriving opposite the ruins of Eben Towle's house, which had stood near the water and was the most southerly in the settlement, I saw what looked like an opening in the bank, which would have been passed unnoticed save for the fact that I had been searching for some such place.

A tangle of bushes and vines grew nearabout, and, worming my way amid these, taking care not to disturb them more than might be necessary, I finally came upon an opening not unlike the den of a bear, which was, perhaps, three feet in diameter.

Thrusting in my head, I cried out, thinking it possible some unfortunate might be hidden therein, and a reply came from Master Bartlett, who was some distance away on the other side of the ruins.

It struck me as queer that he should have been able to hear my voice while I was so far from him, and with my head in a hole, therefore I called him by name, speaking more softly, and, to my surprise, he replied promptly, the words sounding as if they had come from the hole just in advance of me instead of from the open air.

"Where are you?" I asked, in bewilderment.

"Here in the bushes. What are you doing in the ruins of that house when it was agreed you should look for a canoe?"

Then it was that an idea came into my mind which, although it seemed unreasonable even to the

verge of folly, prompted me to force my way into the hole.

I had no more than gotten my body into the entrance when I saw that the sides of the hole, cave, or tunnel, whichever it might be called, were timbered to prevent the earth from caving in, and then that which I had said was folly to imagine became well-nigh a fact.

I was in a veritable tunnel, which widened as I advanced until it was really an underground chamber, where, to my great surprise, I saw stored salted and smoked meat, together with many small packages done up in bark or furs.

I was too much excited, because of this fortunate find, to make any careful examination of the different things around me, but pushed on until arriving at a wall of rock, through which the light of day came from above.

Then it was that I called again for Master Bartlett, asking that he come down to the ruins of the building, and there was that in my voice which caused him to obey without parleying; but when he was near at hand I heard him ask, impatiently:

"Where are you, lad? It is unwise for us to be moving around where those on the other side of the river can see all that is going on, and, if we are not to cross, it is better that we go back into the thicket."

Then it was that I tried to explain what I had

found, but, before I had hardly well begun, he cried, excitedly:

"You have found Eben Towle's tunnel! I remember he declared, two years ago, that he had made one, and had a hiding-place out of which he could not be smoked. That was when the Susquehanna Company had sent warning we would be driven from the valley by force, and declared blood should be spilled if we failed to obey."

"Can you see any show of such a place from where you are standing?" I asked, and it was possible for me to hear his footsteps as he walked twice around the ruins before making reply.

"There is nothing to be seen here but the charred timbers, lad. How did you get in?"

Instead of replying, I made my way out with all speed, save that at the entrance I moved with the utmost care lest I leave a trail, and, on coming into the open air once more, saw that Giles March, having heard our voices, had joined the old man to learn what was going on between us two.

Situated as we were, it was but natural that the same thought should come into the minds of all when the nature of my discovery had been made known. In this tunnel, which Eben Towle had made as a refuge against those of the Susquehanna Company who would have driven him from his home, our little party of women, children, and wounded lads might remain in safety awhile

longer, — surely until the savages tracked us down once more.

On the heels of such fact came to me the belief that the time was now at hand when our company of Minute Boys might be able to give further proof that they could play the part of soldiers nearly as well as men. In this tunnel of Eben Towle's we would be securely hidden in the very heart of the valley, keeping in touch with those who remained at Forty Fort, and it would go hard, indeed, if we did not give good account of ourselves before Butler's wolves returned to Johnson Hall.

Giles March would have gone at once to the mouth of the tunnel, in order to see for himself that which I had found, but Master Bartlett prevented him by saying, sharply:

"None of that, lad! We went in and out of the cave without heed to leaving a trail, thinking none of Butler's curs would come upon us there, and yet they found the hiding-place. To go in simply to gratify your curiosity will be to leave just so many more invitations for those who are prowling around to have a look at it. We will first see what can be done toward opening an entrance from the ruins, so that we may get the helpless ones inside without leaving a sign-board behind them."

There is no good reason why I should set down all we said while trying to decide just what it was best to do at once; it is enough if I say that after more talk than I believed necessary, in view of the

situation, it was decided that we could not bring down the women and children during the night, owing to all the difficulties, and it would not be safe to do so next day, because of the possibility that the savages might come sooner than we expected.

It seemed better they remain in the cave until we had beaten off the Indians when they made the next attack, and this we believed would be a comparatively easy matter, if the plans already formed should be carried out. Therefore it was agreed that Master Bartlett should spend the night at the ruins, making an entrance through them to the tunnel, while Giles March and I went back to get so many of the party as Stephen Morley thought best after we had explained to him all the situation.

Night had come before we arrived at this decision, and we two lads started at once, travelling swiftly because it did not seem probable there was any danger, and with light hearts, owing to the hopes for the future which had so lately been born.

It was near to midnight when we were come to the fringe of bushes which screened the entrance of the cave; but immediately I sounded the catbird's note, it was replied to without delay, and in another instant Esther Hinchman came out to meet us.

"I persuaded Master Morley and Daniel to take some rest, while I stood guard," she began, and I interrupted by asking sharply:

"Why did not Miles Parker do his share of the duty?"

"He was sleeping so soundly that it seemed a pity to awaken him when I was fit for the work; but where is Master Bartlett?" she asked in alarm, noting for the first time that he was not with us.

I explained in few words the good fortune which had seemingly come to us, and while talking I held her hand in mine, to which she did not object.

Then we entered the cave, arousing the others, and explaining to them not only why we had come, but the plans we had formed in the way of falling upon those who attacked the cave, saying in conclusion:

"It has been agreed that you shall say how many, and who, are to go back at once, Master Morley, and I pray that we be able to set off without delay, lest we meet enemies on the path."

"You may take Oscar, who is fit to travel that distance in the night, Daniel and Esther and Miles Parker. So many should be able to carry all the stores we have gathered here, and leave us with no other burden than the wounded when we join you."

I cried out against his sending away all the able-bodied, save the three women; but he insisted that since we were to be on the outside to take part in the battle, if one came off, he had all the help that would be needed, therefore those selected to go made their preparations.

If I have failed to say anything regarding the manner in which our comrades received the news

we brought, it is because words are not needed. One can readily understand that when a party of fugitives, about to be driven from their place of refuge, suddenly learn that another and more secure place has been found, the joy and relief are great.

Within half an hour after Giles and I arrived, the little company was ready to set out, each carrying a full load, and when we filed out of the cave, which had sheltered us so well in the hour of our extremity, I took Esther Hinchman's hand in mine that we might walk side by side.

We made the journey to the river without mishap, although it seemed long and tedious to the others, owing to the heavy burdens we carried; but to me it was a pleasure jaunt ever to be remembered because of her who walked by my side.

Master Bartlett was on the watch for us, and as we were led directly into the ruins, each stepping in the tracks of the one in advance that the trail might not be too plain, it was possible to see what the old man had done.

One of the stones in the wall of which I have spoken was removed, leaving an opening sufficiently large for us to crawl through, and on walking the length of the tunnel I found that end which gave on the river choked up with logs and half-burned timbers.

"I haven't finished the work at that end," Master Bartlett said when I joined the others after the

inspection. "There will be time enough later, and when daylight comes I am counting on starting a fire among the charred timbers in order to hide our trail. There is an hour yet remaining before morning, and you had best get what sleep you can. Eben Towle put up a sort of partition in one corner here, therefore Esther Hinchman may have a room to herself."

We threw ourselves on the floor of the tunnel almost as soon as he had spoken, and I was no more than stretched out at full length before my eyes closed in slumber.

It seemed as if only three or four minutes had passed when I felt the pressure of a hand on my shoulder, and, opening my eyes, saw Master Bartlett in the dim light, as he whispered:

"I've been knocking around a bit, and saw a dozen or more redskins land from a couple of canoes not a hundred yards up-stream. They have struck off toward the mountains, and I reckon it's our business to follow them. We three will go alone; I've told the girl Esther, and she'll keep an eye out till the other lads finish their job of sleeping."

Then the old man aroused Giles March, and we made ready to creep out through the ruins, I lingering behind my comrades to whisper a word to Esther, after which I followed.

Master Bartlett showed, by taking the lead when we had gained the shelter of the thicket, that he

counted on running the business, at least until this portion of our work was done, and I was only too glad to have him thus take command.

A good woodsman was Master Simon Bartlett, else he would not have kept us so close on the heels of the skulking savages without being discovered, and that during all the time we consumed in making the five miles, moving not much faster than a mile an hour.

From their cautious advance it could plainly be seen that John Butler's wolves believed there were a large number of people in the cave, and were afraid of coming across an enemy by mistake, or of finding an overwhelming force in their path.

How my fingers itched to strike a blow when one or another lagged behind at such a distance that we could have overpowered him with but little chance of his being able to alarm his fellows; but Master Bartlett shook his head decidedly whenever Giles March or I told him by gestures of what we would do.

Then, when an unusually good opportunity came, he whispered, warningly:

"Don't make the mistake of striking down one of those villains when we can bag the most of them. If we carry ourselves right between now and the time they fire the first shot at those who are in the cave, it should be possible to give the sneaks such a blow as will make the others a bit uneasy."

Well, we trailed the murderers up to the very

mouth of the cave, and there they hid themselves, hoping, most likely, that one or more of the fugitives might show them a target. I was nearly wild with fear lest Stephen Morley, believing, as we had a few hours previous, that there would be no danger until later, might venture outside.

These fellows must have had with them the cur who escaped when we gave them so warm a reception, else they would have blundered on until coming in sight of the entrance; but, as if familiar with the lay of the land, the entire party concealed themselves not twenty paces from where Stephen Morley was on watch.

We knew full well that no attack would be made until night was nearly come, unless it so chanced our people ventured out incautiously, and settled down with whatsoever of patience we could command, to await their movements.

It must have been nearabout noon when we arrived, and until sunset did we lie in the thicket like logs of wood, not daring to move lest we make so much of a noise as might give warning of our whereabouts.

What a blessed relief it was, when the gloom of night came like a film through the foliage, to see those half-naked villains move more closely together as if making ready for action, and only then did Master Bartlett give signs that he was on the alert.

By gestures he made Giles March and me under-

stand that we were to take stations twenty paces to the right of him, and not to open fire until his musket had been discharged.

Inch by inch we wormed ourselves through the leaves and vines until having gained the station pointed out, and there waited impatiently for that struggle which might end only with the death of one or all, for it was by no means certain the savages would fall readily into our trap.

Then, as the gloom thickened, we could see the dark forms of the murderers as they crept silently through the screen of bushes toward the cave, and I knew it was their purpose to press on until it might be possible to thrust their muskets between the rocks before firing.

I literally held my breath with suspense, fearing lest Stephen Morley be caught off his guard, and could have cried aloud in triumph when the report of a musket rang out, while one of the painted crew came staggering through the bushes to sink on the ground as if having got a mortal hurt.

The curs had found that they could not hope to catch Stephen Morley napping, and once more they crouched behind the screen of bushes as if for a consultation.

Then, when perhaps ten minutes more had passed, we could see even in the darkness that they were making ready for another move, and I fancied it was possible to distinguish a movement of Master Bart-

lett's arm, as if he warned us that our time had come at last.

With our muskets raised, Giles March and I waited, and at the very moment when the savages vanished into the gloom a bright flash and a ringing report from the direction of where I had last seen Master Bartlett, sounded our signal to begin the fight; but, alas! it was no longer possible for us to carry out the plan as it had been arranged.

The one thought in my mind was that if Giles March and I failed of doing our share, the curs would skulk here and there in the thicket, and instead of our being able to give them such a lesson as we had counted on, it would be a question whether we might be able to make our way back to Eben Towle's tunnel.

All this passed through my mind like a flash, and the echoes of Master Bartlett's weapon had not yet died away when I sprang forward, followed so closely by Giles March that it was as if we had been yoked together.

I was saying to myself that there was little hope I would be able in the darkness to see a target, when suddenly a light so bright as to be almost blinding flashed up seemingly from the very mouth of the cave, showing in bold relief the forms of four villains at the edge of the thicket, and on the instant Giles and I both fired.

It seemed to me that I heard the reports of a dozen muskets; flashes of flame sprang up here and

there near at hand as if by magic, and amid the rattle of musketry could be heard Master Bartlett's voice, as he shouted:

"At them, lads! Smite front and rear! Finish the job now, else we may not get another chance!"

Then that happened which absolutely frightened me for the moment, and but for the fact that I realized how necessary it was we strike a heavy blow, I might have faltered.

Here, there, and everywhere that the rustling or swaying of the bushes told some person was forcing his way through, a ball of fire sped through the air in that direction, and then flared out a burning flash which illumined the thicket for a dozen paces around.

I believed I understood the cause of the first light, when we emptied our weapons; but it was more than bewildering to see those fiery messengers seemingly pursuing our enemies, although I was not so dazed but that it was possible for me to strike more than one telling blow, thanks to the friendly fire.

All this while muskets were being discharged from the cave, and I said to myself that Stephen Morley was firing as rapidly as loaded pieces could be thrust into his hands, and even as the thought came I ran plump into him twenty paces from the entrance.

At this moment such of the savages as yet remained alive set up a yell of terror, and the sound

of their footsteps told that they were racing at full speed down the mountainside, intent only on escaping from those mysterious flames.

"It is all over for this night, lads," Master Bartlett called from somewhere amid the darkness, "and now I'd like to know the meaning of all I've seen."

CHAPTER XVI.

ELIAS SHENDLE'S PLAN

MASTER BARTLETT was not the only member of our party eager to learn the meaning of what we had seen. As for myself, I was far too bewildered to reply when Master Morley asked me where we first saw the enemy; but stood staring in open-mouthed astonishment as if he could see me, or I him, while the darkness seemed all the more intense because of those blinding flashes which had dazzled our eyes.

"How was it done?" Master Bartlett demanded, as he came up to where Stephen Morley and I stood, fifteen or twenty paces from the entrance to the cave.

"It wasn't a bad kind of an idea, eh?" Master Morley cried, as he indulged in a hearty laugh, "and the joke of it is that you came near getting scared as badly as did those precious sneaks, who won't stop running till they are with their fellow brutes. I'd give quite a little to hear what kind of a story they'll tell."

"It wouldn't be a bad plan for you to tell your story," Master Bartlett said, sharply. "I've seen

some good tricks in my day, but this one goes ahead of any that's ever been worked in the valley."

"It was planned by Elias Shendle," Stephen Morley said, as soon as it was possible for him to control his mirth, "and I reckon we'd better tell the yarn where he can hear it, because the lad is entitled to all the credit for this night's work."

Then we went into the cave, without making any effort to learn how many of the enemy had remained near by because of not having life enough left to run away, and, to my great surprise, I saw that Elias Shendle and Sam Rogers were on guard.

"Have you so far got the best of your wounds that you can take part in a fight?" I asked, in astonishment, and the lad replied, grimly:

"A fellow can do considerable when it is necessary in order to save his own life. Stephen Morley wanted to creep outside just after dark, that he might take a hand when you opened the battle, and there was no good reason why Sam Rogers and I couldn't look to this part of the business, especially while the women were ready to load the guns."

"But I'm itching to know how you managed to send those balls of fire wherever one of John Butler's wolves broke cover," Master Bartlett cried, impatiently, and Elias replied, in a matter-of-fact tone:

"There isn't anything so very sharp about that trick, although I heard Master Morley speaking to

you as if it was something great. We had a fair supply of powder, and during the afternoon, when there was nothing else to be done, I made fifteen or twenty balls about the size of a wren's egg, wrapping them in leaves stuck together with a little mud. We knew you would be behind the Indians, therefore I had a handful of powder ready just at the entrance, so it could be flashed off when the fight began, to give you a chance to see exactly where the curs were hidden."

"Yes, yes, I understood that part of it," Master Bartlett interrupted; "but what about the flying fire?"

"Mistress Morley kept a brand ready, and I had put a fuse into the small balls of powder. When the fight was well started, I crept part way between the boulders; there I could have an idea of where the red sneaks were stationed, and as she lighted the fuse, I threw the ball in that direction, allowing that it would flash before striking the ground. It stirred them up a bit, I reckon."

"You've got a big head on your shoulders, Elias Shendle," Master Bartlett said, emphatically, "and have done more toward driving John Butler's murderers out of this valley than could have been effected by the killing of threescore. We can now count on having time and to spare for the journey to the river, because you won't see one of those curs around here again until

there are Tories enough with him to do the biggest part of the fighting."

"I'm looking to see the renegade Butler himself over this way within four and twenty hours," Stephen Morley said in a tone of conviction. "It stands to reason that, after hearing the story his sneaks are likely to tell, he'll want to know what's afoot."

"Ay, but by that time we'll be at the river, getting Jonathan Ogden's Minute Boys ready for service," Master Bartlett cried. "Let us get what sleep we may 'twixt now and daylight, for all hands of us must make an early start in order to reach Eben Towle's tunnel ahead of the scouts who may come down the river."

Before obeying this suggestion, which was really a command, I asked Elias if he thought it would be possible for him to make the journey on foot, and then learned that it had already been agreed Mistress Morley should lend him her aid during the tramp.

"With her to lean upon when it comes to climbing over fallen trees, I'll get on all right," he said, cheerily. "Sam Rogers believes he can walk alone, so you need have no fear concerning us two, Jonathan Ogden."

Stephen Morley stood guard while all the rest of the party slept, and as soon as the first gray light of coming day appeared in the sky we set off to make a change of quarters.

The two cripples were sent away first, with the children and Mistress Morley, Giles March leading them. Then, each man and woman loaded to the utmost of his or her strength, the remainder of us followed as best we might, fearing no interruption so we arrived at the river within three or four hours, and it can well be fancied that we made all speed, heeding neither the difficulties of the way nor fatigue.

Before he left Master Bartlett tramped twice far up the mountainside, so that it might look as if we had fled in that direction, and when the last person departed from that which had been to us a veritable cave of refuge, there was nothing remaining save the beds of leaves and the charred embers of the fire.

Those of us who were in the rear soon overtook the crippled lads, and then one and another lent a hand, until they contrived to cover the ground at about the same rate of speed we would have been able to do without them; but I could see full well by the lines of pain of Elias Shendle's face, and by his labored breathing, that he was making the effort of his life.

Much as I pitied the dear lad, I could not advise him to go more slowly, for the lives of all might depend on the last one being within Eben Towle's tunnel in a certain time, and all that remained was to give him such assistance as might be possible.

Then came the time when we crept cautiously

out from the thicket to approach the ruins, each moving swiftly with due regard to leaving a trail, and watching jealously the opposite bank of the river lest there be spectators.

It seemed as if we gained cover without having been seen, and once the crippled lads and the children were safe, Master Bartlett and Stephen Morley spent a full hour trying to hide the trail which, despite our best efforts, had been left behind.

Esther Hinchman had a soft word of greeting for me when we were arrived, which caused me to forget all fatigue, discomfort, or fears for the future, and then we set about making more habitable this place of defence and abode.

Esther, Oscar, and Daniel had worked like beavers doing what they might to make it homelike, and but for the absence of light, I would have said that we could ask for nothing better. As a matter of course the place was dark; but Esther tried to cheer the other women by showing a small store of candles, which had been found among the packages made up by Eben Towle, and promising that, whenever it should be thought safe, the tunnel could be illumined as well as any house.

Then, while we lay upon the ground, resting from the fatigue of the tramp, we speculated as to where the man might be who had dug out this place, which we believed would serve us well.

Giles felt quite certain he was with us when we marched from Forty Fort to give battle to John

Butler's force, and if such had been the case, then was it certain the poor man would never need a hiding-place in this world, for unless he was among the slain, then would we have found him there. He had no family, as we knew full well, therefore it seemed certain that we alone, of all who were left alive in the valley, had knowledge of the tunnel.

I will not undertake to say how much of provisions we found as he had left them. Considerable was spoiled because of having been stored away so long; but sufficient yet remained to keep us alive many days, and, in addition, we had the supplies brought from the cave.

"We are in good shape to begin our work," Master Bartlett said when the situation had been discussed to a finish, "and it is now for us to pay off the scores John Butler has run up."

"How will we set about it?" Elias Shendle asked, eagerly, as if counting that he could do his full share of work with the best of us.

"That can't well be figured out till we know what may be doing at Forty Fort," Master Bartlett replied. "I have had it in mind that we would hold together as Minute Boys, even though some of us are a bit old to be counted in that class, and it will go hard if we don't do some work that will tell, not only to those whose homes are here in the valley, but in the struggle against the king."

"Who will go to Forty Fort to learn what may be doing there?" Daniel Hinchman asked, and I

knew he was burning with the desire to do that portion of the work.

"You, if it so be Jonathan Ogden is willing."

"Why speak in that way?" I asked, perhaps a little petulantly, for it was not to my liking that they hold longer to the pretence of my being captain.

"Because you were chosen as the leader, and I hold to it that you boys shall do the work."

"When you and Stephen Morley are here it is veriest folly to speak of me, or any other member of our company, being in command," I cried, and Master Bartlett replied, quietly:

"All that may be true, lad, and you still remain the captain. Stephen Morley is a member of the Continental army, and must leave us soon. I am not in shape to be called a soldier, else had I enlisted long since; but there is no reason why I should not stay with the Minute Boys so long as pleases me, and, not having made an agreement to serve in the ranks, will be able to leave at any time without taking the chances of being called a deserter."

At this point Daniel Hinchman began moving around as if at work, and Elias Shendle asked what he was doing.

"Getting ready to set out for Forty Fort," he replied. "There is no good reason why I should idle away the time here."

"It would be folly to make any attempt at cross-

ing the river until after night has come," I said, and Master Bartlett added:

"With the chance that the story, which the curs whom we frightened are sure to tell, will bring a large force of the enemy this way, it is not well that we show ourselves more than may be absolutely necessary during the hours of daylight. Stay where you are, Daniel Hinchman, until night has come, and then you may go out through the entrance which lets on to the river. Stephen Morley and I count on having a look around from now till dark, after which it shall be your turn."

I was considerably surprised and very much disgruntled because the old man was, seemingly, shutting me out from any of the work; but did not think it well to complain just then, lest it should appear as if I was trying to assume command of the party while the older men were present.

Half an hour later Stephen Morley and Master Bartlett crept out through the ruins of the house, after cautioning the remainder of us against straying from the tunnel until their return, and we were left to pass the time as best we might.

The majority of the party gave themselves up to slumber, and were wise in thus taking advantage of the opportunity; but my thoughts strayed so far into the future, while I speculated on what it might be possible for us lads to do by way of driving the enemy from the valley, that I could not have closed my eyes in rest however hard I might try.

Therefore it was that, some time later, when I saw Esther Hinchman moving about as if searching for something, I joined her, asking what she would do.

"I was only trying to get a better idea of this queer place where we appear to be so secure," she replied, and it pleased me well to go with her up and down the length of the tunnel, prying here and there to find more of Eben Towle's hoardings, until we were come to that end which gave toward the river.

Here Master Bartlett had thrown up a barricade of half-burned logs and such other materials as he could come at handily. The entrance was not closed so thoroughly but that we could catch a glimpse of the river through the bushes which grew outside.

"It seems good to see the sun shining, even though we cannot feel its warmth," she said, musingly, and I laughed softly, for verily had she had enough of the sun's heat and to spare while coming down from the cave, because then we were like to have roasted.

"If it please God, you shall soon be able to sit in the glare of the sun whenever it may be your fancy to do so," I said, feeling at the time strong enough to fight John Butler's wolves single-handed, so her life was at stake, and before it was possible to reply, even had she been so minded, there suddenly came into view on the river a veritable fleet

of canoes, heading as if to make land near the ruins of Eben Towle's house.

I should say, speaking well within bounds, that there were no less than sixteen boats, all filled to the utmost of their capacity with Indians and white men, and it was not needed that we should question as to why they had come.

These were John Butler's Tories and red wolves, sent to learn the secret of the cave on the mountain where so many of their companions had met their fate, and I really trembled with what was very like fear as I thought of what must have been the result had we not found another hiding-place just as we did.

Each canoe carried five or more passengers, and when that large force stood in front of the cave we could not have hoped to hold it many hours, however desperate may have been our resistance.

Now, however, they had come in vain, and when the terror aroused by what might have happened had passed away, I laughed aloud as I saw in fancy the slow, cautious advance up the mountainside, the stealthy approach, and the rush upon the cave where remained no living being.

Nearer and nearer the fleet approached the shore, and, laying her finger on her lips, Esther glided noiselessly away from me to warn, as I fancied, our comrades against the lightest sound lest the secret of our hiding-place be betrayed.

When she returned all the lads were with her,

and we watched our enemies as they came ashore, drew the canoes high out of the water, and then disappeared beyond our line of vision toward the forest.

There was not one in all that small army who showed signs of joy at taking part in such an expedition. Every face was grave, while many had an anxious look, and it was not difficult to believe they had been ordered to perform the duty, rather than having volunteered, for, according to such a story as the frightened savages must have told, they were about to have an encounter with those who dealt in magic.

During a full half-hour we could hear them moving around just over our heads, as if loath to set out on the final stage of their journey, and then the sounds died away until silence reigned as before the renegades and curs showed themselves.

Even then we in the tunnel did not dare to speak lest some of the party had remained behind to act as sentinels, and were sitting there silent and motionless, when those sounds were heard which told that Master Bartlett and Stephen Morley were entering the hiding-place by way of the ruins.

Then we knew all the ruffians had departed, and straightway our tongues were loosened, as we asked of the men what they had seen, at the same time explaining how it was we knew of what had been going on.

"I reckon you are as wise as we," Master Bart-

lett replied, "for we were obliged to remain at a distance. They have gone to take the cave, and it is safe guessing that not one of them will dare to remain in the woods after dark, even though it can be seen only a party of fugitives were concealed there. Stephen Morley and I believe it will be possible to deal out such a dose that they won't be eager to visit this side of the river any oftener than may be absolutely necessary, therefore if you lads who can move about are minded to come with us, the work of the Minute Boys can be begun 'twixt now and sunset."

Never one of us waited to hear what the old man's plan might be; but all eagerly set about making ready for the excursion, and ten minutes had not passed before the male members of the party, save only Elias Shendle and Sam Rogers, were in the open air, seeking cover in the nearest thicket.

Master Bartlett led us up-stream, once we were within the shelter of the woods, until having left the tunnel nearly a mile behind, and then halted where it was possible to have a full view of the river.

"What is the plan?" Daniel Hinchman asked eagerly when we were come to a halt.

"There isn't any, lad," Master Bartlett replied, with a laugh. "It only came to Stephen Morley and me that we might begin to square accounts with those curs at once. They will, of course, go up-stream, at least as far as Forty Fort, after finding that the cave is empty, and I'm reckoning that we

won't see them this way until nearly dark. We'll scatter along the bank twenty paces or so apart, keeping under cover, of course, and when they show up, open fire. They won't have the heart to come ashore in search of us; but in case they should, we are to strike out for the cave, going as nearly as may be over their trail. That's all we had decided upon, and if things don't go as we have figured, it will be a case of each for himself, with the understanding that no one is to go near the tunnel until it is certain he will not be seen by the enemy."

It would have pleased me better had the old man decided to meet the curs in open fight, for this striking a blow in the darkness, with the odds all in our favor, smacked too much of the same style of fighting which John Butler called warfare; but it was not for me to find fault when we might make reprisals in some slight degree for the massacre of our people.

We took our stations according to the instructions given by Master Bartlett, and, ready to kill, but not accounting it other than a just punishment, awaited the coming of those who had laid waste our beautiful valley.

Not until half an hour after sunset did the foremost of the canoes come in sight, and the men were paddling wearily as if after a hard day's march.

It had been understood that the signal for us to begin work would be the report of Master Bartlett's musket, and we waited eagerly for that, each fellow

with his musket levelled and resting on a branch or stump that he might send the bullet more truly.

The sights of my weapon covered a big savage, whose head-dress of feathers told that he was more vain than his brothers, else he would not have worn that ornament while on the war-path, and I had no doubt of bringing him down, for the boats were well within the range of our muskets.

Then, when five or six of the foremost canoes were directly opposite where we had taken our stations, Master Bartlett fired, and one of the curs who had been paddling fell over the side of the frail craft in such a manner that it filled on the instant, leaving its occupants floundering in the river.

I had the satisfaction of seeing the red brute at whom I aimed fall backward, and while reloading had a full view of all that took place. Not one of our party had missed his target; two of the canoes had been overset by the struggles of those who were wounded, and such of the boats as yet floated were headed for the opposite bank in desperate haste.

It would have done me real good to give voice to the feelings of triumph which were mine when I saw those sneaks in such a panic of fear; but I held my peace, and stood ready for a shot at the next canoe, when I came to understand that all was not going as the old man had counted on.

Giles March, who had been stationed next below me, came up hurriedly, as he whispered:

"Master Bartlett gave the signal too soon; he

should have waited till the last of the fleet was passing. Those in the rear are coming ashore on this side of the river, and we are like to have a warm time unless we can gain the cave, in which case we may find ourselves regularly besieged."

He had no more than ceased speaking when all the party came up, for my station was the one toward the north, and Master Bartlett said hurriedly:

"Three canoes have been hauled up on this shore; the others are putting straight across the river. Is it in your minds, lads, that we keep together, or separate, in the retreat?"

"If but three boat-loads have landed, let us stand our ground like men; there will be time enough to take to the mountain when we see too large a force coming across the river to have a share in the scrimmage," I said, quickly, eager for a pitched battle.

"Jonathan Ogden is right," Stephen Morley said without hesitation. "Thus far only about fifteen men have come ashore, and we can make the odds more nearly even when they first show themselves."

No one made a protest, and we took our stations, each for himself, but within easy distance of the others, and all where they could be hidden from view of those who were coming up.

It was to be a battle in the night; but we who stood for the right could see as well in the dark-

ness as those butcher's curs, and had more of a heart for the fight, it was reasonable to suppose.

"Fire whenever you see anything moving; but try not to waste a shot," Master Bartlett whispered loud enough for all to hear, and then came those sounds, faintly yet distinctly, which betokened the advance of the enemy.

"Now has come the time when we begin to tell John Butler that he has yet to reckon with the Minute Boys, before he can take possession of this valley," Giles March, who stood next me, whispered, and before I could make reply the report of a musket broke the stillness.

Another report, and another, but yet I could see no signs of the enemy, strain my eyes as I might, and in my impatience I moved forward two or three paces, when a bullet came singing past my head.

The savages had been doing all the firing, as I soon believed, and it caused me no little shame when I realized that they were gaining the advantage which should have been ours.

"Can you see anything?" Giles March whispered as he came to where I had sheltered myself behind a big oak-tree, and I replied, as a better understanding of the situation came into my mind like a flash:

"They outwitted us by sending part of their force straight toward us, while the remainder sneaked up the river bank, counting that we would not be looking for danger from such direction.

Face about, lad, and let us give them a bit of their own music."

Now instead of searching with our eyes to the south, we slipped from tree-trunk to tree-trunk until we were within perhaps thirty paces of the stream, and then we had targets in plenty before us.

No less than five — two savages and three white men, as I made out — were coming warily up from the water looking for us, and heeding not the possibility that we might have made a change of front even as they had done.

Crouching on one knee I fired, bringing down my game, and an instant later Giles March had winged another. The remaining three hunted cover in a twinkling, and when we had reloaded our weapons, I shouted to the others of our company:

"They are coming up from the river! Have an eye out in that direction!"

"Get together, lads!" I heard Master Bartlett cry, doing so lest Giles and I should shoot our own comrades, and as soon as might be thereafter, each fellow moving as rapidly as possible, we were united once more.

I did not understand why the old man had made this move, until he whispered in my ear:

"It is likely that the noise of the firing will bring others from the opposite side, and it is in my mind that we had better circle around them."

"To the end that we may take refuge in the cave

once more?" I asked, and he replied with what was very like a chuckle of satisfaction:

"It may be we could come at the canoes while they are searching here for us, in which case all hands might have a look at Forty Fort before morning."

CHAPTER XVII.

FORTY FORT

THERE was to my mind something comical in the idea of circling around the enemy to get possession of their canoes, for it would seem as if we might thus appear to be playing with them as a cat does with a mouse. In addition to the satisfaction we would have in so outwitting them, was the fact that the manœuvre must perforce mystify the curs, until they came to believe we were strong in numbers.

It was only necessary to make a wide détour toward the mountain, travelling silently, in order to accomplish the purpose, and I begged Master Bartlett to set about it without delay.

"Let each keep well on the heels of the man in front, so there may be no danger in straying, and remember that silence as well as speed is necessary, else we may find ourselves in trouble," the old man said, hurriedly, and then he led the way toward the east, we following his instructions to the best of our ability.

Not until we were well on our way did I realize what this attempt to play a trick might cost us. In

event of our movements being discovered before we had gained possession of the canoes, the enemy would be led to believe we had a hiding-place further down the river, and might spend much time trying to find it.

There was no danger that those in the tunnel would betray their whereabouts carelessly, for all, even to the children, understood full well how much of danger threatened; but if I had found the entrance to Eben Towle's hiding-place when searching for a canoe, it was more than possible they might come upon it while hunting for us.

Therefore it was that I became seriously disturbed in mind, even before we were well committed to the movement, and would have drawn back while there was time, if it had been possible to explain to my comrades what had thus suddenly occurred to me.

When I tried to stop the file in order to whisper a warning, however, each fellow was so eager to come to a successful conclusion of the venture, that he simply moved forward all the faster when I would have detained him, and I could do no less than refrain from any further efforts in that direction lest too much noise be made.

There was no longer anything comical to me in the attempt we were making, for I questioned whether by such a venture the lives of those who were hidden in the tunnel had not been imperilled without due reason.

However, despite all my forebodings, we made the détour successfully, gaining the river bank a full half-mile below where we believed the enemy were searching for us, and then it was necessary to creep up along the water's edge until coming to the canoes.

And this also we did without detection, finding the frail craft on the shore with never a man left to guard them.

Six canoes were there, and all these we took, our party embarking in two, and towing the others well out into the stream, when, stopping sufficiently long to slash the bottoms with our knives in such fashion that they could never be repaired, we sent them adrift.

"Now we have forced those curs to stay on the same side of the river with those whom it is our duty to guard, and who can say that they may not find the tunnel before we return to defend it?" I said, gloomily, as the last of the wounded canoes disappeared from view.

"We need have little fear of what they may do 'twixt now and sunrise," Master Bartlett said, curtly, as if he also had begun to question whether we were acting wisely. "It will be well to midnight before they give over searching the thicket for us, and as much more time must be spent looking after the boats. In the meantime we shall have returned."

"Ay, unless we come across those on the opposite

shore who are strong enough to hold us there," I replied, and then held my peace, ashamed of thus croaking like a bird of ill-omen.

We buckled down to the paddles, each one realizing by this time the necessity of making all speed, and the light craft skimmed the surface of the water like birds.

Then, at the very moment when we heard the report of a musket from the shore where the enemy were searching for us, the bows of the canoes ran up on the bank.

We had come into the very thick of John Butler's wolves, and the lives of those left behind depended, perhaps, upon our returning before daylight.

"It was a fool's trick for us to make this venture," Giles March whispered to me after the canoes had been hidden among the bushes where we might find them again without too long a search, and we were following at Master Bartlett's heels.

I gripped his arm hard, but made no reply. He thus told me that much the same forebodings had come into his mind as were in mine, and the fact did not tend to render me any more cheerful.

We were all familiar with the country hereabouts, and, since it simply remained to make our way over travelled roads, there was no reason why we could not push on rapidly, save only when we might see others in advance.

Nothing occurred to delay us, and it was yet early in the night when we arrived near the log walls of

Forty Fort; but, much to our surprise, we saw sentinels on the walls, as if the place was being defended against an enemy.

We came to a halt within the shadow of all that remained to mark the site of Joseph Seddons's house, and Stephen Morley said hurriedly:

"Let me go on to learn what I may of the situation, and, if possible, have speech with Colonel Dennison. I am not counting myself a better man than any other in the party; but, if being discovered, can explain my reason for being here, on the ground that I have come to learn when I am to report for duty in the army."

"Go on, Stephen, and do not spend overly much time, for we may be needed on the other side of the river," Master Bartlett said, thus showing that he, too, had grown anxious concerning the safety of those whom we left behind.

While he was absent we kept well within the shadow of the ruins, not daring to talk even in whispers, and listening intently for any sounds from the opposite shore which might betoken that our secret there had been discovered.

Stephen Morley had rare good fortune in his attempt to have speech with those of our friends who yet remained inside the fort, as we learned ten minutes later when he returned, and with him was none other than Colonel Dennison himself.

The officer greeted each of us in turn as if we were old friends, and it could be readily understood

that he felt great relief of mind at knowing there were yet alive in the valley those who were eager to drive out the brutes who had brought us so much of misery and grief.

"I have told him nothing concerning ourselves," Stephen Morley said, and straightway Master Bartlett gave the colonel a brief account of our doings since the battle, saying in conclusion:

"Here are six of us ready for whatsoever comes to our hands, and on the other side are three more who will soon be able, please God, to do duty. We count on holding together to defend the valley so far as we may, and ask you if there is any chance we can do anything toward repairing the ruin that has been wrought?"

"Indeed you can," Colonel Dennison replied, eagerly, "and it gives me new hope to know there are so many near at hand. What about the stockade at Wilkesbarre?"

"It yet stands as when Colonel Zebulon marched out with his men; no attempt has been made to destroy it, which seems to me exceeding strange."

"That is because the Tories who follow John Butler count on taking possession of all the country roundabout, and in order to hold it will have need of the fortified places. Because of the knowledge which the enemy has that your party is on the other side of the river, and owing to your attack upon the canoes to-night, the stockade here is defended as if an immediate battle was expected.

Only by the most fortunate of chances did I happen to see Stephen Morley, and was able to get outside without arousing suspicion. Let me tell you of the situation here, for, in order to be of service in the valley, you must know of it."

"First tell me, sir, if John Butler is holding to the terms upon which you surrendered?" Master Bartlett interrupted.

"I believe he is trying hard to do so; but the savages are refusing to recognize his authority. We have in the fort upwards of thirty women and children, and fourteen men and boys, none of whom dare stray outside the stockade lest the red brutes murder them. Unless something can be done speedily, there is no question in my mind but that we will all be massacred. John Butler has already admitted to me what I knew full well, that he is unable to hold in check his wolfish followers, and because of such fact, proposes to depart immediately with such of his army as yet obey his commands."

"How many of the red snakes will likely remain behind?" Master Bartlett asked quickly.

"Butler has told me that not less than two hundred have already broken away from him, therefore we can count on that number prowling around, with this fort as a headquarters, and in such case every white person remaining will stand in the shadow of death. I had despaired of being able to effect anything; but since knowing you are near

at hand, it begins to seem as if we might be able to hold our own against them, if nothing more. On the day before John Butler marches away, I will make every effort to send all our people over the river, and believe he will aid me in the task, because of being unable to hold to the written promises he made before we surrendered."

"But our hiding-place will not give shelter to half the number you have named!" Giles March cried in dismay.

"I was not counting that either you or they should remain in hiding," the colonel replied, gravely. "You Minute Boys must take possession of the Wilkesbarre stockade at once, putting forth every effort to hold it for the coming of our people. That will give them a refuge until we can get help from the outside, as I believe will be possible when the situation is made known."

"Can you give any guess as to when the people may come across the river?" Master Bartlett asked.

"I shall try to send a messenger the day before, therefore do you be on the lookout for him each morning shortly after sunrise. The greatest danger is that these savages who have thrown off all allegiance to John Butler will fall upon our helpless ones while they are crossing the river, or when they land, therefore you must be on your guard against anything of the kind."

"Will you not come with them?" I asked, and the colonel replied:

"It is more likely I shall go with Butler, as the surest and quickest way of getting to such portion of the country from which aid may come to us."

Then he went on to advise what we should do to hold the stockade, and gave us to believe it might be possible to send by the women some addition to our store of ammunition, but dampened our spirits in no slight degree by stating that those who might join us would be without weapons, since it had been necessary to deliver up their arms when the fort was surrendered.

The interview was brought to a sudden end when the reports of half a dozen muskets were heard from the other side of the river, and we could see the glow of a fire which increased each moment until the flames were leaping high in the air.

"They have discovered that the canoes are missing," the colonel said, hurriedly. "It is time for you to go, and I will get inside the walls, for, because of their failure to take any prisoners, our people may be in danger."

Even as he spoke the colonel left us, keeping within the line of shadow as he approached the stockade, and we started off at our best pace, for the red wolves, seeing the call for help on the other side of the river, were swarming out of the fort like bees from a hive.

Now had come the time when we had need of all our wits to save our skins, owing to the fact that it was necessary to advance directly down-stream

where was no shelter. Except for the darkness we could never have gained that place where the canoes had been hidden, because Indians and Tories were running to and fro in greatest excitement, and more than once were we on the verge of being discovered.

However, we did succeed in embarking, and then it was necessary to paddle down-stream, keeping within the denser shadows of the western shore a mile or more, before venturing to cross.

When, finally, we stood near the ruins of Eben Towle's home, the signal-fire was yet burning, and Master Bartlett said, in a tone of satisfaction:

"The cowards at Forty Fort haven't yet made up their minds that it is safe for them to cross. Because of what we have done the whole boiling of them are grown exceeding cautious, even though knowing full well they have butchered nearly all in the valley."

"And they will kill yet more before the women and children can be got across to this stockade," Stephen Morley added gloomily. "Those who have declared they will not follow John Butler any longer are hanging back only that they may slaughter the helpless ones in the fort, and will not allow them to go away in peace."

Such words were only in accord with what had come into my mind while Colonel Dennison was talking so glibly of our holding the Wilkesbarre stockade, when we had no more than seven muskets with which to arm the defenders.

There was no good reason why we should stand outside where, at any moment, we might be discovered by those whose canoes had been destroyed, and Master Bartlett led the way into the tunnel, where we were welcomed as if after a long absence.

As a matter of course we told of all we had seen and heard since going out, and it was Mistress Morley who picked the first flaw in Colonel Dennison's plan.

"If all the people come over into this stockade, where will you find food enough to feed them during such time as the colonel is searching for those who may be willing to aid us?" she asked, and I, who had been thinking only of the lack of weapons, cried thoughtlessly:

"It can't be done! We shall only succeed in bringing death upon all this party!"

"If we think first of our own safety, what becomes of the proposition that the Minute Boys shall take it upon themselves to defend the entire valley?" Master Bartlett asked, gravely, and I replied, hotly, thinking more of Esther Hinchman's life than any other:

"It is not defending the valley when we sacrifice our own to save others! Here are so many who have come out alive from the slaughter, and now shall we give them over to starvation, or the mercies of those wolves, that strangers, whom we cannot defend or feed, shall come in?"

"It was the Minute Boys who were to do the

work," and Master Bartlett spoke so calmly and slowly that I was near to crying out with vexation. "You are the captain, and it is for you to say that when John Butler abandons the women and children now in the fort to those of his followers whom he cannot control, they shall not come here."

For the moment I was silenced, and then it was that Esther Hinchman put her hand in mine, as she said in a tone so low that none save me could hear the words:

"It is better all of us meet death than refuse a share of what we have to those who are in such sore need."

After that, which was neither more nor less than a reproof, I could say nothing, and because no one spoke again, we laid ourselves down to rest, if indeed that might be possible when there was so much to make us wakeful.

It must have been nearly daybreak before my eyes closed in slumber, and when I awakened Esther Hinchman called for me to come where she was sitting at the entrance to the tunnel, looking out over the water as it sparkled in the sunshine.

"Why was I allowed to sleep so late?" I asked, taking a seat by her side, and giving no heed to the others of the company.

"Master Bartlett said we should be careful not to disturb you, because of your having remained awake so long," she replied, in a whisper. "Shall I get you something to eat?"

"Not now; I have no desire for food, and if the lack of appetite lasts, it will be well, for we must go on short allowance when our company has more mouths to feed."

"Master Bartlett, Stephen Morley, Giles March, and Daniel have been out since early light searching for game, believing the savages will not venture across the river again until the day is older."

It annoyed me because I had not been called upon to make one of the party; but I choked back the petulant words which rose to my lips, lest she might think I was accusing her, and then she began to speak of Colonel Dennison's plan, soon convincing me that there was no other course for us to pursue than such as he had mapped out.

"Those at Forty Fort, and we here, are all of our people remaining in the valley, and it is far better every one of us perishes by starvation than that a portion of the number be abandoned to such fate as would be theirs," she said, softly, and I resolved then never to say another word against the plan.

Toward noon the hunters returned, bringing with them two deer and considerable small game, after which Stephen Morley took it upon himself to go back into the thicket with a haunch of venison, that he might roast it where a fire could be built with little danger of its being seen from the other side of the river.

We ate heartily when the meat was cooked, de-

spite the heaviness of our hearts, for it had been a long while since any of us tasted warm food, and then came the question of when we should take possession of the stockade, all of us knowing only too well that within a very short time after doing so, it would be necessary to defend ourselves against the open attacks of those savages who defied John Butler's authority.

There could be but one answer to such a question; it was necessary for the safety of those who were coming to us for protection that we be prepared to receive them at any moment, therefore must we move quickly, and when Master Bartlett asked if I was willing to make another change of quarters as soon as night should come, I replied heartily:

"The sooner the better, lest some of the red curs settle down in the stockade before we can do so. I believe it is well for us to keep secret the existence of this tunnel, however, so that at the last extremity these women and children have a hiding-place not known to others."

There is no good reason why I should spend many words in telling of our entering Wyoming Fort, from which we might never come alive.

As soon as the friendly darkness settled over the land, we left the tunnel, carrying all our little store of food and ammunition, and within an hour our sentinels were stationed on the walls.

The Minute Boys were on duty again, and my forebodings as to the future were not so gloomy

but that I felt a certain thrill of joy because we had at last come out openly against the enemy.

"From this on, until our valley is freed from such as John Butler has brought into it, and the colonies are free and independent, we will hold together, if so be our lives are spared," I said to Giles March, and he replied, fervently:

"It is as you have said, Jonathan Ogden. We do not make much showing as soldiers just now; but if our hearts remain true, the time will come when we may hold up our heads with any in the colonies, so far as military service is concerned."

We talked much that night concerning what we would do, and how it might be possible to supply ourselves with all that was lacking, for neither of us was in the mood for slumber, and when the day dawned I went here and there inside the stockade to see how the women, to whom the task was entrusted, had provided for our welfare.

It could be seen at a glance how relieved all were at being able to move about at will once more. The children were already romping to and fro inside the enclosure, frolicking like so many lambs; the women were clearing rubbish from such of the buildings as they had decided we should occupy, and our wounded were lying on the ground where they might feel the warm rays of the sun.

"It does a fellow solid good to be in the open air once more," Elias Shendle said, as I halted by his side. "I believe that a week's imprisonment

in the tunnel would have put an end to me; but now I'm counting on doing my full share of duty a couple of days later."

Sam Rogers looked up with a bright smile, as he said, cheerily:

"It is well worth all the extra danger to be here, and I believe it will be no more work to defend this place than it would have been in the tunnel, where we must have been caught like rats in a trap if the savages had got an inkling of our whereabouts."

Esther Hinchman was darting here and there, bent on one duty or another, looking so happy that in my surprise I asked what had come over her, and she replied, cheerily:

"It's the fresh air and sunlight, Jonathan Ogden. While we were in the tunnel I felt as if I was turning into an owl; but now the feathers are beginning to drop off," and away she ran, as if we of Wyoming Valley had never seen any who would do us harm.

"It is good for us all to be here," Master Bartlett said, as he came up to where I stood watching the children at play. "We can count ourselves soldiers now, which was more than could be done while we skulked from cave to tunnel, and the work which we have set ourselves seems well begun."

Then it was that Daniel Hinchman, who was standing guard, startled us all by shouting:

"A canoe, in which are three people, is coming

down the river! It may be that Colonel Dennison has sent the messenger of which he spoke!"

We seized our muskets, those of us who were able to do duty, not feeling inclined to be taken by surprise, and stood on the walls until the craft was beached directly in front of the stockade, when we saw that it brought a man and two women, all of whom came up the bank staggering under the weight of heavy burdens.

"It is Andrew Hardy!" Stephen Morley cried. "He is one of my neighbors whom I left in the army when having got a furlough. It may be the Congress has begun to remember that a soldier should be allowed to protect his wife and little ones when there are none others to look after them."

These newcomers were indeed messengers from Colonel Dennison, come to say that John Butler, with such of his following as he could control, would march out of Forty Fort on the following morning, and at the same time our people in that stockade would make the attempt to join us.

Andrew Hardy and the women had not come to us empty-handed. They brought two muskets, powder, and ball sufficient for perhaps fifty charges, and twenty pounds or more of smoked pork — all that Colonel Dennison could get together in a hurry.

The colonel had sent a message to the effect that the people would set out from the stockade at daybreak; but that he was fearful an attack might be

made upon them, either when they landed, or while the canoes were yet upon the river.

"Are you to go back?" I asked of Andrew Hardy, and he replied:

"I was told to remain and do duty in the company of Minute Boys until such time as it becomes necessary to return to the army."

"How does it happen that you got a furlough?" Stephen Morley asked.

"Five of us who live nearabout here were allowed leave of absence; the others have gone in search of their families who, if they escaped death at the hands of the savages, fled with those who succeeded in leaving the valley before Fort Jenkins was taken."

I had no curiosity regarding the man, nor was I inclined to spend my time listening to what he might tell regarding the condition of affairs at Forty Fort. The word which the colonel had sent regarding the probability that our people might be attacked before it was possible for them to reach the stockade was in my mind, and, motioning Master Bartlett aside from the others, I said to him:

"I am of the mind that the two canoes which we took from the enemy, together with the one we have been using, and that in which Hardy came, had best be brought inside, so we may be able to put out in case the savages pursue the helpless ones too closely."

"It is a good idea, Jonathan Ogden, and it does

me good to know you can plan so well for the future. Stephen Morley and I will attend to the work, and in the meanwhile you had best make ready for trouble. It is my belief that we are like to have plenty of it before many hours have passed."

"Think you there may be danger before to-morrow morning?"

"Ay, lad, you may set it down as certain that some of those red sneaks have seen Andrew Hardy and the women leave the fort, and will soon be coming down the river to learn where they went."

Then Master Bartlett called for Stephen Morley to aid him in bringing up the canoes, and I set about such preparations for meeting the enemy as it was possible to make.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE REFUGEES

WHILE I was walking here and there, scrutinizing carefully all the stockade to learn where, if any, were its weak points, Esther Hinchman came up, and it goes without saying that I stopped to speak with her.

"It is not for me to interfere with the men's work in any way, Jonathan Ogden," she began, with a bright smile, "nor would I do so even to the extent of asking questions; but we women believe we should be counted as among the defenders of the stockade and ought to be looked upon as such."

"Indeed, we so reckon you," I replied, puzzled to guess what she might be driving at.

"Then give us regular duties to perform. We can stand guard in the daytime as well as any other, for our eyes are as sharp as yours, and if we take that work upon ourselves, then it will be possible for all the men to remain on duty during each night."

It was a most welcome proposition she had made, since, by following it, we who counted ourselves men would not be heavy-eyed while standing

guard in the darkness, when we knew the most danger threatened, and so it was arranged, save that I would have put her off until the next day.

"Let us begin at once," she said, firmly, "and then it will come more natural when danger thickens."

Well, without consulting my comrades, I stationed Esther Hinchman and three other women on the stockade at once, and Giles March asked, laughingly:

"Have you turned your command into Minute Girls, Jonathan Ogden?"

When I had stated what was to be the arrangement while we were so short-handed, he, as well as all the others who heard me, believed it was a wise plan, and, now that there was no longer need of us on the lookout platforms, we went here and there examining the defences, strengthening them as much as possible by setting other logs where any showed signs of weakness.

The canoes had long since been brought inside the stockade, and every lad and man in the company was working to the utmost of his ability, when a low cry from Esther Hinchman took me to her side.

"A canoe is coming down on the other side, keeping well inshore," she said. "I cannot make out that there are more than two persons in her."

"Master Bartlett was right when he said some of those curs would come down to see what had

become of Andrew Hardy and his companions!" I cried involuntarily, and then, like a flash of light, came to me an idea which, if properly carried out, might be turned much to our advantage.

"Call the women down from the platforms without delay, and as quietly as may be. See that they all go into the blockhouse, taking the children with them," I said, hurriedly. "I believe we may trap those curious ones if we work quickly."

Esther did not delay to ask questions; but, running from one platform to another, called off her sentinels, and while I was talking with Master Bartlett, I saw that the dear girl was gathering the children up as one does a flock of sheep.

"If we keep out of sight those curs will be likely to stroll inside the stockade through curiosity," I said to the old man, after telling him of what Esther had seen. "Now I cannot say in what way it would advantage us to hold prisoners, although the time may come, before we have regained possession of the valley, when a few of those wolves in a cage would be something with which we might drive a bargain."

"How will you do it?" Master Bartlett asked, without declaring for or against my plan.

"I would have you and Stephen Morley hidden outside where you could shoot down the savages if we bungled the trapping of them. Then the remainder of our force should be just inside the gates, which are to be swung half-open. The

women and children are already within the blockhouse under orders not to show themselves or make any noise. If we can't take them prisoners, we can at least shoot them down."

"Stephen Morley and I will look after the business outside," Master Bartlett said curtly, and in another instant he was beckoning Morley to follow him.

It was not necessary for me to spend above five minutes in posting all my force behind the half-opened gates, and each fellow had his musket ready for use on the instant, in case the curs entered and were not disposed to surrender quietly.

The blockhouse was closed, and the doors and windows securely fastened, so there was no fear the inmates would come to harm through any stray bullets, in case we had a scrimmage.

When I stood where it was possible to peer through the narrow crevice between the gate and that portion of the stockade to which it was hung, the Indians were just stepping out from their canoe, having seen where Andrew Hardy pulled his craft up on the mud, and, because the curs were looking around for a trail, I believed they would walk directly into our trap.

With a cautious warning to my comrades that they might know the decisive moment was near at hand, I looked well to the priming of my musket, and waited nervously for that which was to come.

Straight as an arrow from a bow, the curs walked

toward the stockade, following the trail and looking suspiciously around as they advanced.

There was nothing to alarm them in the fact that the stockade was thrown open, for so they must have expected to find it; but on arriving at the entrance, where it was possible to have a view of the enclosure, the two half-halted as if scenting danger.

Then one spoke in his native tongue, pointing toward the blockhouse, and both advanced until the gates could be swung behind them.

At the same instant that two of the lads shoved the heavy barrier into place, Daniel Hinchman and Andrew Hardy leaped out on the left side of the foe, and Giles March and I on the right, with our weapons levelled.

The sneaks sprang forward two or three paces as they turned with upraised hatchets to face us, and then must they have been blind indeed had either failed to note that it would be instant death to make any attempt at striking a blow.

I must give them credit for a show of bravery when they saw how thoroughly well the trap had been sprung. There was no sign either of surprise or fear as they faced us, and without a word both unslung the muskets from their shoulders, throwing them to the ground, together with knives and hatchets, after which the fellows stood with folded arms, as if having no further concern as to what might be done.

"Let Master Bartlett and Stephen Morley come inside," I called to Miles Parker, who had been given charge of the gates, keeping my musket levelled all the while, as did my comrades.

The two men obeyed the summons in a twinkling, they having come up instantly the gates were closed, and I said as they entered:

"I believe it is best that you take charge of the prisoners, because it stands to reason you have had more experience in such matters than any of us; but it strikes me you would do well to first make sure they have no other weapons about them."

Master Bartlett deftly took from the statue-like savages their ammunition, and then said in a matter-of-fact tone:

"It's all right, lad; you can look after other matters, for I guarantee these sneaks will stay with us till we get ready to send them — I know where they'd go if I was in command of this party."

The prisoners moved toward the farther end of the enclosure in obedience to the old man's direction, and I believed they were to be imprisoned in the shed where we found Elias Shendle.

"Well, lads," I said, cheerily, "we have two more muskets, ammunition to go with them, and a canoe in addition to what we had at sunrise, which is not a bad morning's work, as I look at it. Andrew Hardy, you had best bring the boat into the stockade, and I will let out the women and children."

Half an hour later matters inside the fort were much as before the enemy came within sight, save that in the shed, bound hand and foot to heavy logs, sat two scowling savages, and I hardly dared trust myself to look at the curs, so sorely did my fingers itch to give them righteous punishment for the murders they had committed.

The women were on the platforms again, and all the other able-bodied of the party, women as well as men, continued the work of strengthening the stockade.

There was no further interruption to the labor that day, and when night came I believed the walls were strong enough to resist any attack, save that by fire, which might be made.

"We're in better shape than we were this morning," Giles March said, in a tone of satisfaction, as we went up to the blockhouse for our supper, after which we counted on relieving Esther Hinchman and her three companions from sentinel duty. "One man and two women have been added to the number of defenders; the ammunition they brought, and that taken from the prisoners, makes a good showing, and, best of all, we've got more weapons than before those curs blundered into our trap. If we could do as well every day the Minute Boys of Wyoming Valley would soon begin to loom up big."

It pleased me that he could find so much reason for rejoicing in our situation, because I could not

take my mind from the fact that soon we would have so many mouths to feed our store of provisions would speedily be exhausted.

I myself took Esther Hinchman's place on the platform as sentinel, and said, as she lingered a moment beside me:

"Because of your standing guard, we have made ready for whatsoever the enemy has in store for us, and the watch has been as vigilant as if regular soldiers were on duty."

"We count that we ought to be able to do a full share of the work, and it is only right, since but for us and the children you men could soon find places of safety other than in this blood-stained valley," she said, gravely. "We four will get a full night's sleep, and you can reckon on our reporting for duty before sunrise in the morning."

Then the dear girl leaped lightly down to the ground, and I could not prevent my eyes from following her as she ran into the blockhouse, catching up a child in her arms as she went.

We did good duty that night as sentinels, for all save Master Bartlett had a share of the work. I had insisted that he should get such rest as was possible before the morrow came, when, what with the refugees and the savages, we were like to have our hands full.

Nothing was seen or heard to cause alarm or uneasiness during the night, and when the first gray light of coming day could be seen in the sky,

Esther Hinchman and her companions came out to take our places on the walls.

"We have had breakfast," she said, as I handed her my musket, "and have left food ready for you, so eat as quickly as you can, that those last on duty may have a chance to sleep until the people from Forty Fort appear in sight."

There were none of us who cared for more rest, since each had slept four or five hours, and when breakfast had been eaten I went in search of Master Bartlett, who, so some one reported, had gone with Master Morley to feed the prisoners.

The old man had come to an end of his task when I found him, and was feeling in good spirits, thanks to his long time of repose.

"The Minute Boys have got together again in fine shape, lad," he said to me, "and I am looking to see them give a good account of themselves from this time out."

"I pray God we may be able to do so, Master Bartlett; but I want you to bear well in mind that you are, in fact, the commander who will give me timely warning when I am careless or overconfident. I know that you would not hesitate to propose any move which might benefit those whom we would aid."

"Don't fear but that I shall do whatever I may, lad, yet I'm thinking there'll be little for me to do in the way of watching you, and said as much to Stephen Morley when you set your trap yesterday.

A lad who has his wits about him to that extent can be depended upon to look after his company fairly well."

It pleased me to be thus praised by a man like Master Bartlett; but I tried hard not to show my delight, and spoke of this thing or that until once more Esther Hinchman hailed:

"There is a fleet of canoes coming down the river, and I doubt not but that those of whom Colonel Dennison spoke are among the company."

In a twinkling the old man and I were on the nearest platform; but it was four or five minutes before we could see what Esther had reported, so much sharper were her eyes than ours.

Then it was possible to make out no less than twelve boats, loaded to the water's edge, while along the bank of the river marched a company of soldiers as if keeping watch over the people.

"John Butler knows only too well that the wolves which he has let loose upon us are not to be trusted out of sight, and has sent the Tories to make certain the savages bring the people here," Master Bartlett said to himself, and I am glad to set down here that one honest thing which Butler did after working us such deadly harm.

"The trouble will come, if they count on making any, after the people have landed," I said, counting on getting advice from the old man. "It seems to me we might make more certain the refugees will be brought to the shore, if we send out a couple of

canoes, with the best part of our force, to hold the brutes in check after they are beyond range of yonder Tories."

"It is what should be done!" Master Bartlett said, emphatically. "Leave the matter to me, for you must stay in the stockade, and I promise you there will be no treachery on the part of those who are at the paddles."

It would have pleased me better to go with those who ventured out from the shore; but I knew that, as the old man had said, it was my duty to remain, therefore held my peace while he was gathering the company.

By this time it was possible to see that each canoe was handled by two savages, who had most likely been sent to take the craft back when the passengers were disembarked, and I trembled with apprehension as I realized what would be the result if the treacherous curs, instead of coming to the shore, kept the boats in the middle of the river until beyond range of the stockade or the Tories.

Master Bartlett did not wait for the fleet to come up, but with six of our company in two canoes, set off to meet them, coming up with the foremost while they were yet under the guns of the soldiers on the opposite bank.

Then it was he forced them to pass before him on a direct course to our fort, and I took note that the old man seemed to be hurrying those who lagged, lest a single person be spirited away.

Thanks to the precautions we had taken — and I verily believe that had we remained within the stockade not one of that sorrowful company would have escaped death — the refugees were soon on shore, making all speed to gain the shelter of the fort, as if there absolute safety would be found.

When the last white person had left the canoes, the Indians would have lingered; but Master Bartlett, having landed his force, ordered them away, and the levelled muskets were sufficient incentive for them to obey the command.

I watched until it was certain the last red scoundrel had paddled toward the opposite shore, and then came down to meet those who claimed protection from us Minute Boys.

Now lest I multiply words needlessly, by trying to give a complete list of those who had come to us, let me say that there were thirty-two women and children, and fourteen men and boys added to our number. Owing to Colonel Dennison's efforts with John Butler, every member of the party, save the very smallest children, brought with them more or less in the way of provisions, and three of the men had succeeded in getting off with their muskets by taking the barrel from the stock, and packing both pieces in bundles of clothing.

In addition to this, sixteen of the company had secreted about them powder and ball, so that it seemed as if we need not fear to run out of either provisions or ammunition for a week at least,

though I promised myself that as soon as it could be done, I would have a careful estimate made of all our stores.

Counting all the men and boys who had just arrived, together with our wounded, my company of Minute Boys numbered twenty-four, or two more than when we went into Fort Jenkins hoping to hold it against all the Tories and savages who might come. To arm these, however, we had only fourteen muskets, with, possibly, a knife for each one, since nearly all of the fugitives had been allowed to bring with them knives as well as hatchets.

Our force was even stronger than I have stated, for among the women were no less than sixteen who looked as if they might be counted on to stand guard, reload weapons during a fight, and, perhaps, do not a little work if it came to a hand-to-hand scrimmage.

"It isn't a bad showing," I said to Master Bartlett, after looking over the newcomers. "We should be able to hold this place at least until our ammunition is exhausted."

"Even more than that can be done, lad, if you hold yourself steadily as the captain. Insist on each man and woman doing his or her full share of the work, and when you give an order, take good care that it is obeyed promptly. Discipline is even more necessary than weapons, and the commander's hand must be firm."

At that moment I was thinking more of how we

might add to the store of provisions than as to exercising my authority, and interrupted the old man to call Giles March, saying to him when he was come:

"Take with you a full dozen men and boys, and make search of all these ruins. There must be food of some kind, burned or otherwise, in such fragments of the buildings as are yet standing, and there should be gardens nearabout from which considerable may already be gathered."

He did not delay to question, but summoned those nearest at hand, and when he was gone I sent six more women to the lookout platforms, urging them, and those already on guard, to keep sharp watch while Giles and his company remained absent.

Well, the result of that move was that when night came we had stores in plenty — corn ground and in meal, young potatoes, smoked pork, and salted fish in such quantity that I believed we could hold out though we were besieged three weeks. But the prizes found this day were two cows that had taken to the thicket when the savages first appeared, who came out lowing to be milked.

My heart was lighter than it had been at any time since we first went into Fort Jenkins when I took Esther Hinchman's place on the platform, binding her by solemn promise that she would spend all her time in sleeping, until another day had come, unless by chance we were attacked.

As it proved there was very little sleep to be had by any within the stockade on that night; we had our first taste of the work we had just begun, and I make bold to say that we did not come off badly, considering our lack of weapons.

We had no more than relieved the women of sentry duty when Giles March, who was stationed near the northern end of the wall, cried out that he could see a canoe close under the opposite shore, and before the light of day had died fully away, we saw three others, all dropping cautiously downstream.

No more warning of an attack than that was needed; we knew full well that the curs would do what they might at striking a blow before morning, and, therefore, were ready for them when the time came.

The women who had been selected to aid in the defence were warned to be ready when the first shot was fired, and Giles March and I made the rounds carefully after night had fully come, cautioning those who stood facing the thicket to fire at any moving thing.

Not until near to one o'clock in the morning was any move made by the painted curs, and then one of them showed himself long enough for Daniel Hinchman to send a bullet where it would do the most good, from our point of view.

Then it was the bloodthirsty wolves came at us with a rush, counting, most likely, to find that we

had no weapons, and when I leaped on the platform to do my share in the battle which had begun so suddenly, Esther Hinchman was already there.

"What are you doing here?" I cried, sharply, discharging my musket with good aim at a painted fiend who was coming forward at full speed as if to clamber up the wall. "Get down out of danger! I *will* not have you here!"

"I can keep watch while you reload your gun," she said, pleadingly; but I literally forced her down, threatening that she should never again perform sentinel duty if she dared to disobey.

From that moment until the rush had been checked, I had no time to give heed to her, for the savages pressed us hard during ten minutes or more, and all the while I could not but bewail the fact that we were expending our ammunition so rapidly, although every fellow strove hard not to waste a shot.

At one time I believe it was possible to see not less than an hundred dark shadows, which we knew to be John Butler's mutinous followers, and more than once, before we succeeded in driving them back, did it seem certain some of them would succeed in scaling the walls.

Never had I known the curs to fight so boldly, and I now understand that it was because they were half-crazed by the quantity of rum drank immediately after Butler and his Tories marched out of Forty Fort.

We had a breathing spell of ten minutes or more, during which time the women cleaned our fouled muskets, and we quenched the thirst born of the fumes of burning powder, at the spring near the blockhouse.

Then, as suddenly as before, the battle was resumed; but it could soon be seen that we were beset by a much smaller force. It seemed positive that a goodly number of the cowards, finding us far stronger both in numbers and weapons than they supposed, had given over the attempt, and when I became convinced such was the case, the thought came that now indeed was the time to show the brutes they were no longer the masters in our valley.

"Find Master Bartlett for me, and quickly. Tell him to come here at once," I said to Esther Hinchman, who had remained just below my station all the while we were fighting.

It was as if I had no more than spoken before the old man was by my side, and I asked, hurriedly:

"Do you know how much we have suffered thus far?"

"Mistress Morley just told me that we had two wounded; but those who were without muskets have taken their places, therefore the fighting force has not really been lessened."

"Then, hark you, Master Bartlett! You said to me that I should not give an order without making certain it was obeyed, and I now command you

to take upon yourself the defence of this place, after our numbers have been reduced by nearly one-half.

"What do you mean?" he asked in surprise, but he did not turn his face from the foe, nor had I ceased to fire whenever a target presented itself during the time I was talking.

"I believe that now has come the moment when we should strike a blow ourselves, instead of remaining on the defensive as if too weak to meet those brutes openly. I count on taking with me nine of the lads whom I know best, and slipping out of this place. We will fall upon yonder curs from a point where they are least expecting to see us, and if it be possible to get them on the run, I promise you we will not turn back this side of Forty Fort, if so be we can contrive to cross the river."

I had expected to have a long argument; but much to my surprise, the old man never so much as opened his mouth, and after waiting a few seconds for a reply, I slipped down from the platform, leaving him in my place.

"You may never come back," Esther Hinchman said, with a sob, as I stood by her side, and then did I know she had heard what passed between Master Bartlett and me.

"It is not for you to grow faint-hearted at the very moment when I believe more can be done in behalf of the valley than if we were to defend ourselves behind a stockade for the next two months.

I *shall* come back, and with me all who go out, provided our first blow be successful."

"I will pray that God does not take you from us," she sobbed, and then it was that I kissed her, running at full speed across the enclosure a moment later, lest I be tempted to linger by her side rather than take my chances among the red wolves.

Around the stockade I went, calling down from the platforms Giles March, Daniel Hinchman, Oscar Stephenson, and all the lads I knew best, until I had withdrawn nine from the walls, and then in a few words I explained what we might do.

Not one of them flinched; they were even more eager than I to make the venture, and we gathered by the small gate until that moment came when the firing seemed to be heaviest at the northern end of the stockade, when all slipped out, crouching to the very ground as we ran straight toward the mountain, an hundred paces or more, where good cover was found.

Then off we went, northward, until believing we were behind the attacking force, after which we halted to make certain our muskets were primed.

"Now, lads," I whispered, "let us keep well together, for nothing can be gained by separating, and if so be we succeed in frightening the curs, we'll keep at their heels even to the very border of their encampment."

"It is likely they are quartered in Forty Fort," Miles Parker suggested, and I added:

"So much the better if they are! Once we get them on the run, it wouldn't be anything very wonderful if we could take that stockade, even though it is held by more than an hundred."

As a matter of course I had no hope we might do any such work as that, but I thought it would encourage some of my comrades to greater exertions if they fancied that was our goal.

The halt lasted no longer than for me to say what I have here set down, and then we started in that direction from which the reports of the muskets came, moving cautiously at first, lest the villains hear us too soon, and then with a rush when it was possible to see the flashes of their weapons.

"Now at them with a yell, but don't fire till you are certain of hitting the mark!" I whispered, and forward we went, shouting at the full strength of our lungs, and coming upon the cowards from behind.

They had no more than time to realize they were flanked, when we let drive a volley, and for every bullet a painted brute fell.

We halted to reload, hoping to get in a second volley before they had fully recovered from the first alarm; but work as we might, it was impossible.

When we were ready to fire again, not a moving thing could be seen, but far away in the distance could be heard the sound of their footsteps, or the swishing of the branches as they tore through the

foliage in headlong flight, intent only on gaining the river.

"Now for it!" I cried when my musket was loaded. "We must never let them off without one more shot, and if it be that we can prevent their taking to the canoes, we'll give them a taste of being hunted down like wild beasts, as were our people!"

If it had not been that Master Bartlett supported us nobly at the very moment when he could do the most good, we would have failed in giving the brutes the lesson I had planned.

We were hardly more than started on our second charge when yells and screams, accompanied by musket-shots, rang out just ahead of us, and Giles March cried, exultantly:

"Our people in the stockade are lending a hand, and it will go hard if we don't pepper a dozen or more before they can put off!"

When we came into the open again it was to see our comrades standing near where a dozen or more canoes were hauled up on the shore, firing at a dark mass in the distance, which we knew to be the panic-stricken murderers.

"Let them have it, lads!" I shouted, discharging my weapon, and, while the others were following my example, I ran forward until finding Master Bartlett.

"The dose hasn't been as heavy as I reckoned on; but there is yet time to increase it," I said,

hurriedly. "We will take two of these canoes, and do you carry the others into the stockade."

"Where are you going, lad?" the old man asked, as if about to make some protest.

"To the other side, where we can pick off the curs as they swim across, and to Forty Fort, mayhap," and I pushed off one of the light craft, shouting for my comrades to join me.

Master Bartlett stood by till the last one of us was in the canoes, and then, as we paddled swiftly away, he cried:

"Give it to 'em hot, lads; but don't take too many chances, for we'll soon be needing you here!"

CHAPTER XIX.

FREEING THE VALLEY

I BELIEVED that now, if ever, was the time when we might give John Butler's curs such a drubbing they would be glad to follow their leader, and I also realized that if we could not strike a heavy blow on this night, then might we expect to get it hot from then on.

We had already shown the brutes they were not to have everything their own way, as had been the case since they first began the bloody work; but if we failed to follow up our advantage, it went without saying that they would be upon us next day burning to avenge the death of their fellows.

All this I said to my comrades as we paddled swiftly up-stream, working gradually toward the other shore, and Giles March replied, grimly:

"It is better to fight one tough battle than half a dozen mild ones wherein neither side gains an advantage. If you are so minded, Jonathan Ogden, I will follow you even into Forty Fort."

"Except for dividing a party already too small to hold one stockade comfortably, I believe we might take the fort this night; but even if it was

open for us to walk in, we would have no right to take possession, because of the fact that, once inside, we might find it difficult to get out again, and it is as Master Bartlett has just said — they will soon be needing us at the Wilkesbarre stockade."

We had hardly more than gained the shadows of the opposite shore when from around a bend came a canoe in which were three savages, heading as if to join the fellows we had just routed, and I motioned for those at the paddles to hold our canoe motionless.

"I'll take the one in the bow; Giles March shall aim at the second fellow, and Daniel Hinchman will look after the third," I whispered. "One, two, three, fire!"

The three reports rang out like one, and the canoe swung around with the current, having in it nothing of life, for our aim had been true.

"It is such work as we will continue to do until every wolfish savage and Tory cur is driven out of the valley!" I said, exultantly, and then gave the word for both canoes to be put in to the shore.

There could be no question but that those nearabout the fort had heard the firing, and we might expect some of them would come to learn the cause. We had no desire for a regular battle on that side of the river, therefore did I believe it best to get under cover.

By the time we had landed and hauled the canoes out of water at the foot of a huge oak-tree, where we

might be able to find them again without too much searching, it was possible to hear cries from the opposite shore, as those who had retreated in such haste called for their comrades to ferry them across, while near at hand were such sounds as told that the red villains were disturbed.

"While they are hunting around here for us, we will make our way to the fort, and then come down upon them once more in the rear," I said to my comrades. "If we can double on them two or three times, as when we began this work, I'm of the mind they will believe themselves completely surrounded."

Then, without waiting to hear what they might think of the plan, I pressed forward in the direction where I knew the fort lay, but taking good care to get away from the river bank with all speed.

By skulking behind this ruin or that, crawling across the open places, and running when having gained what would serve as cover, we arrived in the rear of the fort at about the same time that a large number of half-naked imps passed out of the big gates, heading toward the river.

Now that we had arrived I was wholly at a loss to decide what it might be possible to do. I had sufficient sense to understand that it would be more than foolhardy to venture inside, for even though only a few remained there, they might be strong enough to hold us in play until some of those from the river bank could come up, when the capture of our party would be well-nigh certain.

While I stood within the shadow of the heavy timbers asking myself how we might strike a blow, my eyes fell upon a heap of shavings, left, no doubt, when one of the savages fitted a new handle to his tomahawk, and I said on the impulse of the moment to Daniel Hinchman:

"Everything hereabout is dry as tinder, and if we could gather enough light stuff it might be possible to set fire to the logs. Then, in the excitement, I'm thinking it would be possible to shoot down a few more of the murderers."

It was as if he took this for a command, and in a twinkling all the party were gathering such inflammable material as was nearest at hand.

Because there was close about so much with which to start a fire, no more than five minutes were spent before we had piled up against the logs, and stuffed into the crevices, a huge mass which extended along the wall for a distance of perhaps twenty feet.

"If that doesn't set the stockade on fire, it will make a big show," Giles March said, with a chuckle of satisfaction. "What is to be done when the blaze has been started?"

"We'll make for the bushes along the river bank, and it will go hard if we don't succeed in hurting half a dozen before they understand what is going on," I said, and then came the question of lighting the dry stuff without spending too much time.

It was Giles March who settled the matter by

proposing that he and I stay behind while the others gained a hiding-place near the water's edge, and then set off the pile at each end by flashing into it powder from our muskets.

This we did, taking to our heels immediately tiny flames told that the burning powder had done its work, and we succeeded in joining our comrades before the savages were alarmed.

Hardly more than fifty paces from where we were hidden a dozen or more of the curs stood looking toward the other shore, chattering like a lot of crows, and I motioned to my comrades that when the right moment came we would take the group for our targets.

The flames leaped up quickly and furiously; but fully five minutes passed before a single cry was heard, and during that time the fire must have fastened on to the dry logs of the stockade. Then a shrill cry was heard from the fort; the curs we were watching wheeled suddenly around, cried out as if summoning some of their comrades near at hand, and would have run in the direction of the flames, but that we fired.

How many fell I am unable to say, for I was bent only on reloading in the shortest possible space of time, and when my weapon was in condition for use once more, not an Indian could be seen.

I counted that we had the wolves in a fine state of indecision, for it stood to reason they had taken all their belongings into the fort when John Butler

marched out, and if they stopped to hunt for us everything might be burned, while, on the other hand, unless we were dealt with speedily, others would fall beneath our bullets.

When the last of the party had loaded his musket, I led the way rapidly as far up toward the flames as we could go while remaining under cover, saying to my comrades when we were again halted:

"Shoot the first cur who shows himself, and at a show of their coming for us, make all speed to where the canoes are hidden. I reckon we've done as much mischief on this side of the river as is safe, for I'm not minded to lose any member of this party."

We had not been in position above two minutes when five Indians came up from the shore at full speed, counting to pass within a dozen paces of where we were in hiding, and I motioned for the other fellows to fire, at the same time preventing Daniel Hinchman and Giles March from raising their weapons.

Thus it was we had three loaded muskets when the race began after we fired into the squad, for it so chanced that following directly on the heels of those whom we shot at was a larger party, who opened fire immediately, at random, of course, since we were under cover, but more than one of their bullets came nearer than was pleasing.

Then it was, in accordance with the plan already formed, that we beat a retreat; but before arriving

at the oak-tree four of the curs were close behind, and we saw the advantage of having saved three charges for an emergency.

"Giles March and Daniel Hinchman will halt and fire when I give the word," I said, while we were running. "The others are to keep on for fifty paces, and then, if we are yet pursued, stop to reload in order to check those who may be behind us."

Then I cried "Halt!" and my two comrades stopped suddenly, wheeling around like a flash, and discharging their weapons before our pursuers had time to swerve from their course.

We brought down only two; but the others took to their heels, and for the moment we were safe from pursuit.

The rest of our party halted to reload, as I had ordered, and when we three came up, it was to follow their example.

Having recharged my musket, I was so foolish as to fancy the moment had come when we might exult over our successes, and stopped to have speech with my comrades, giving no heed as to silence; but the first word had no more than been spoken when half a dozen muskets were discharged close at hand from the riverside, while the sharp twinge, followed by a sensation as of burning, told that I had received a bullet in my left arm.

"Don't shoot till you can see what you are fir-

ing at!" I cried. "Press on to the canoes, else are we like to find ourselves in a trap!"

But for the fact that we were among the bushes, all of us might have been shot down. Even as it was we found it exceeding difficult to get out of the scrape, for the savages pressed us hard, but without showing themselves, and it seemed as if their numbers were increasing each instant.

Then came the time when I realized that it would be worse than folly to answer their shots. The curs were so near that nothing save speed would avail us, and I gave the word for the lads to run at their best speed, without regard to anything except keeping themselves hidden from view as much as possible.

When I came up to where the canoes had been left, they were already in the water, and now was our time of greatest peril, for while paddling out from the shore the savages could shoot at will.

"We're working for our lives now, lads!" I said, speaking hurriedly, while clambering into the frail craft. "Let all save those at the paddles be ready to shoot when the first villain breaks cover, and while reloading, bend over as much as possible, lest you give them too fair a mark at which to aim."

As I think of the matter now, it seems almost incredible that any of us got away alive, and yet we finally came out of the scrimmage with only one wound in addition to that which I had received.

Miles Parker had an ugly cut on his cheek as good proof that John Butler's wolves were precious poor marksmen, and my arm was useless.

Before getting well clear of the shore we put an end to three of the wolves who had ravaged the valley, and then, in midstream, we could see the flames leaping high into the air over Forty Fort, telling that the last stockade remaining on that side of the river was speedily being destroyed.

"It's a good night's work, lads!" I cried, exultantly, heeding not the pain in my arm. "We have struck a blow such as they won't forget, and it will go hard if we can't deal another now that they are without a fort, save by crossing the river!"

"If we can only keep after them!" Giles March cried. "Two or three more nights like this one, and they would be glad to follow John Butler's trail."

"They shall have as much more of this work as they are willing to stand," I replied, hotly. "The two of us who are wounded will soon be ready for duty again, and in the meantime the rest of you can keep up the dance."

Then we were within hailing distance of our stockade, and Master Bartlett's voice came to us from across the water, as he asked, anxiously:

"Are you all there, lads?"

"Ay, and with but two slight wounds to show for all the powder and lead those curs have wasted," I replied, gleefully.

"And it was you who set fire to Forty Fort?"

"That we did, and if our company had been a little larger, I dare venture to say we could have taken the stockade."

"We couldn't have held it, therefore it is better it should go up in smoke without delay," Master Bartlett replied, and then we were at the shore.

Carrying the canoes with us, we entered the stockade, and it so chanced that Daniel Hinchman and I were side by side when Esther came up.

"Which of you has been wounded?" she asked, sharply, and Daniel made answer:

"Jonathan Ogden. His arm should be attended to at once, for we can ill afford to lose our leader at the very time when the Minute Boys are showing what it is possible for them to do."

She spoke never a word, but would have led me away at once had not Master Bartlett stopped us to ask:

"Think you that those whose canoes we captured are yet on this side of the river?"

"They must be. I question if the scoundrels at the fort have had time or the inclination to go after them, for we made matters right lively."

"And I'm thinking that we should keep up the work," Master Bartlett replied. "There's no chance they will get their wits together sufficiently to make an attack this night, and if you say the word, Stephen Morley and I will take four or five of the lads who did not go with you, and see

whether we can't add to the work you've done, before the sun rises."

It made me a bit jealous to think of a party setting off while I remained behind; but I could not reasonably make any objection to his proposition, and even as I entered the blockhouse with Esther that my wound might be dressed, the old man went out through the small gate.

"I'll answer for his lessening the number of those brutes before we see him again, and now if ever is the time to keep after them, for once they have a chance to gather their wits, we'll have our work cut out for us," Giles March said, as he went to the spring, and I followed Esther into the building, almost content to be disabled since she was to play the part of nurse.

Had I done as Esther Hinchman begged me, I would have remained inside the blockhouse all night, counting myself an invalid who stood in great need of repose; but it would have required more than one small wound to keep me there among the women and children while the Minute Boys were giving good proof of what they could do when half an opportunity presented itself.

When, an hour later, I came into the open air, Giles March and Daniel Hinchman were keeping watch, although all the platforms were occupied by the women who acted as sentinels. Forty Fort was yet burning fiercely, the flames rising so high in the

air that they must have been seen twenty miles away, and I said to my comrades:

"The red curs didn't make any effort to put out the fire."

"I reckon that was our fault," Daniel replied, with a hearty laugh. "We made such a disturbance around there that, by the time they had a chance to do anything except hunt us, the flames must have got under good headway. It is likely all the lodges had been set up inside the stockade, and I'm hoping they didn't have a chance to save them."

There was really nothing I could do in the enclosure, while so many of the women were on guard, and after a few moments I went to see Elias Shendle, who, so Esther had told me, was mending very fast.

The poor lad almost cried when I told him of all we had done that night, so great was his sorrow because of not being with us; but I consoled him as best I might by predicting that he would soon be able to do his full share of the work, and promising he should go out with a party whenever there was a likelihood of striking the enemy hard.

The talking caused a feeling of drowsiness to creep over me, and, lying down by his side with the idea of taking a short nap, I fell into a sleep from which I did not awaken until after sunrise next morning.

"Why didn't you arouse me?" I asked reproachfully of Elias, and he replied, with a smile;

"I would have done so when Master Bartlett and his party came back; but Esther Hinchman threatened me with all kinds of dreadful punishments if I so much as moved, and because she seems to be in authority over us who are wounded, it didn't seem wise to disobey her."

Going out-of-doors quickly, I found Master Bartlett lying on the ground near the door of the blockhouse, and he did not wait for me to question him concerning what had been done.

"I brought all the lads back, and with never a scratch on one of them," he said, in a tone of triumph, as I appeared.

"Did you find the savages?"

"Ay, that we did, a dozen or more, and before we were done they had a taste of what our people suffered when they were used as targets while striving to swim across. I can't say just how much we accomplished, but am satisfied that a full half of the squad won't make any more trouble for us. In addition to that, we've got two more prisoners to feed, and they have lost another canoe."

"It will be necessary for them to set about boat-building, if they count on staying here very much longer," I said, with a laugh. "It seems to me, unless John Butler brought twice as many canoes as his army needed, we must have gathered in the better part of their outfit."

"Another night like that just past, and we'll have seen the last of those who have wrought so much

harm to us of the valley. With our two prisoners we got a couple more muskets, and I'm thinking it wouldn't be a bad idea to search along this shore. We must have killed some of the brutes, who are lying there with their weapons."

It surprised me that I had not hit upon such a plan myself, and as soon as might be I sent out Giles March, with three comrades, to search for whatsoever might be of service to us.

The party came back before noon, bringing five muskets and eight hatchets, as well as a goodly store of ammunition, therefore could we count that the number of Minute Boys ready for duty had been increased by seven, counting the guns taken from the prisoners.

Now were we in good truth a power in the valley, and straightway I set about racking my brains for something in the way of one grand blow, other than risking a regular battle, which would convince the enemy that it was unsafe for him to remain any longer.

"We are strong enough to stand against a goodly number of them now," I said, thinking aloud, and Master Bartlett replied as if I had questioned him:

"You'll do no more fighting this two weeks, lad, and I've had it in mind that you had better let Stephen Morley and me go out for awhile. I'm burning to know where the brutes are located now the stockade has been destroyed."

Well, we talked long and earnestly on the matter,

finally coming to the agreement that the old man should, on the coming night, take a dozen lads with him, and cross the river; but it was with the understanding that he would not make an attack save when the odds or chances were greatly in his favor.

It was not pleasant for me to see my comrades setting off while I remained behind; but there was no help for it when another night had come, and I stood on the platform nearest the water, with Esther Hinchman by my side, watching the dear lads as they paddled across the river, wishing most fervently that I could be with them.

They had not been gone above half an hour, and I was still on the lookout's platform by the side of Esther, when we were startled by seeing what appeared to be a veritable army of men coming up the river. For the moment I believed the savages had circled around back of Forty Fort to surprise us, thinking we would have no suspicions of those who came from that direction.

I had just leaned over to tell one of the women who chanced to be passing that all the men were to be aroused, when there came a hail in good English from the fleet of canoes.

"Fort ahoy!"

When I had replied to the hail the question came:

"Who is holding that stockade?"

"The Minute Boys of Wyoming Valley, aided by those who were so fortunate as to come from Forty Fort alive."

"Who is in command?"

"I, Jonathan Ogden."

"You have done well to hold the place, lad; but it will be easier from now on. I am bringing you thirty good recruits, all of whom are well armed, and amply supplied with ammunition and provisions."

I could hardly credit my own ears, for such news seemed far too good to be true, and I cried, incredulously:

"Who may you be to have brought us that of which we stand so sadly in need?"

"John Franklin, of Hunterdon. I went with Colonel Zebulon Butler's followers to Conyngham, and nearabout there have mustered these recruits, all of whom are eager to meet those who have laid waste this valley."

Half an hour later Captain Franklin and his men were inside the stockade, having brought with them in the way of ammunition and provisions sufficient to serve us for many days to come.

I did not really believe that all these young men — there were no old ones among them — would be willing to serve under me until we had come together and I put the question squarely to them, when they declared their willingness to regularly enlist, if it might be possible so to do.

We were yet holding converse, seated on the ground near the blockhouse, when Esther Hinchman cried out that Master Bartlett's party was re-

turning, and, leaping up on the platform, I cried to the old man:

"Have you met with disaster that you are back so soon?"

"Not a bit of it, lad. We haven't wiped out any of John Butler's wolves, nor even seen one, for the very good reason that they have pulled out of the valley."

"What?" I cried, in amazement. "Do you mean that they have followed Butler's trail?"

"As near as we can make out that is exactly what they have done. You lads made it a bit too hot for them last night, and the curs hadn't the stomachs to wait for another dose. We have an idea that some of them may be hanging around in the hope of doing mischief without risking their skins; but it's certain the biggest part have left in a hurry."

Is there any need for me to say that we rejoiced that night — not only we who had passed through all the scenes of horror, but those who had so bravely come to our aid?

After it was possible to settle down soberly, for we were well-nigh crazed with joy as we had been with grief, we held a consultation wherein each member of our company was free to air his opinions, and it was finally decided that we would hold the stockade until it was certain all the savages had gone from the valley. If then — say two or three weeks later — there appeared no good reason why the Minute Boys were needed there, we were

of the mind to offer our services as an independent company of the Continental Army, and Captain Franklin promised to lay the matter before the military authorities without delay, for we were determined that when we did enlist it should be with the express stipulation that we remain together rather than be drafted into this company or that.

And now that I am come to an end of what some may claim is no story at all, but a lot of facts pieced not very skilfully together, I am puzzled to know how to stop. It would be a labor of love to tell in detail of all we did from that day when the recruits came to us from Conyngham until the king was glad to make peace, recognizing the United States of America as a new nation which gave promise of becoming one of the world's great powers; but I fear no one would have the patience to follow the words so long, for we saw much of fighting and adventure.

When there was no longer any need of an army, and we were mustered out of service, I was still the captain of the Minute Boys of the Wyoming Valley, while Elias Shendle ranked as first, and Daniel Hinchman as second lieutenant. Giles March was captain of a company from New York and Stephen Morley a major in the Connecticut line.

Master Bartlett was yet alive when, on leaving the army, I went to Tioga to see Esther Hinchman, who had the same as promised to be my wife, and

there I met him. Then it was he said to me that which I shall ever remember, and with which it seems fitting I should close my work on this tale of our doings.

"But for the Minute Boys of Wyoming Valley, Jonathan Ogden," he said to me as Esther and I sat by his side, "very much more blood would have been shed by those human wolves John Butler let loose upon us, and that act of my life in which I take the most pride is the share I had in what was done by your company around Wilkesbarre and Forty Fort."

THE END.

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